NATION

French aerospace giant to set up unit in Delhi

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BUSINESS

FM to equal record of former PM Desai by presenting 6 budgets in a row

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SPORTS

Djokovic stunned by Sinner in huge semi-final upset

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ بنگلور

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PHOTO: PTI

58 kids fall sick after eating meal at MP school

REWA, 26 JAN

As many as 58 children fell sick due to suspected food poisoning after having a meal following Republic Day function at a government school in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district, an official said on Friday. The condition of most of them was stable while one girl has been admitted to a government hospital here. The children were served poori-sabzi and laddoos after the flag-hoisting at the school, located at Peadri in Sirmaur, said District Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr KL Namdeo. Many of them began to feel uneasy with some complaining of vomiting and loose motions, he said. The children were taken to a community health centre. As the condition of one of the girls turned serious, she was taken to Government Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Rewa where she was undergoing treatment, Dr Namdeo said.—*PTI*

FACT-CHECKER ZUBAIR GETS TN COMMUNAL HARMONY AWARD

CHENNAI, 26 JAN

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Friday presented State government's award for the promotion of communal harmony to fact-checker Mohammed Zubair "in recognition of his contribution to prevention of violence" by debunking claims in social media that migrant workers were under attack in Tamil Nadu.

Co-founder of AltNews, Zubair was presented the award by Stalin at the 75th Republic Day celebrations here.

In March 2023, claims were made on social media that "migrant workers were being attacked in Tamil Nadu", the government said. After verifying the authenticity of the video clips that made such claims, Zubair made it amply clear in AltNews that such claims were false and that such attacks did not take place in Tamil Nadu at all. "Thus, he stopped the spread of rumours against Tamil Nadu and acted to prevent violence caused by caste, religion, race and language," in the state, the government said in the citation.

Zubair, a resident of Denkanikottai taluk of Krishnagiri district, has also been "rendering services to promote communal harmony", the government said. —*PTI*

34 Cong MLAs made heads of boards and corporations

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Ending the suspense over the appointments for State-run boards and corporations, Congress party on Friday released the first list of 34 chiefs who are legislators. The postings with Cabinet ranking will be for two years or until further orders, a notification said.

Among them, the prominent postings are Shantinagar MLA NA Haris who was appointed as Chairman of Bangalore Development Authority; Gubbi MLA SR Srinivasa as Chairman of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation; Hosakote MLA Sharath Kumar Bache Gowda as Chairman of Karnataka State Electronics Development Corporation; and KGF MLA Rupkala M as Chairman of Karnataka Renewable Energy Development Corporation Private Limited. Sindhanur MLA Hampanagouda Badarli was appointed as Chairman of a corporation/board; Muddebihal MLA Appaji CS Nadagowda as Chairman of Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited; Kagwad MLA Bharama Gowda as Chairman of North Western Karnataka Road Transport Corporation; Bagalkot MLA Hullappa Yamanappa Meti as Chairman of Urban Development Authority; Badagi MLA Basavaraj Neelappa as Chairman of Karnataka State Forest Development Corporation; and Hosadurga MLA BG Govindappa as Chairman of Food and Civil Supplies Corporation.

NA Haris, Sharath Kumar Bache Gowda and Vinay Kulkarni PHOTO: X

Bhadravati MLA BK Sangameshwara was appointed as Chairman of Karnataka Rural Infrastructure Development Limited; Arsikere MLA KM Shivalingegowda as President of Karnataka Housing Board; Hubballi MLA Abbayya Prasad as Chairman of Karnataka Urban Water Supply and Drainage Board; Kudligi MLA BK Gopalakrishna as Chairman of Karnataka State Forest Industries Corporation; Bangarpet MLA Narayana Swamy as Chairman of Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation; Challakere MLA T Raghu Murthy as Chairman of Karnataka States Small Industries Development Corporation.

Magadi MLA HC Balakrishna was appointed as Chairman of Karnataka Road Development Limited; Rona MLA GS Patil as Chairman of Karnataka Mineral Development Corporation; Bailhongal MLA Kaujalagi Mahantesh as President of Karnataka State Financial Corporation; Chamarajanagar MLA C Puttarangashetty as Chairman of Mysore Sales International Limited; Dharwad MLA Vinay Kulkarni as Chairman of Karnataka Urban Water Supply and Drainage Board; Bilagi MLA JT Patil as Chairman of Hutti Gold Mines; and Shorapur MLA Raja Venkatappa as Chairman of Karnataka State Warehousing Corporation. Srirangapatna MLA AB Ramesha Bandi was appointed as Chairman of Chamundeshwari Electricity Supply Corporation. —*Salar News*

India, France firm up defence pact during PM-Macron talks

Tata group and France's Airbus to make helicopters together

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

India and France sealed an ambitious industrial roadmap to co-develop critical military hardware, firmed up a space situational awareness programme. Meanwhile, Airbus SE and Tata Advanced Systems Ltd agreed to jointly build H125 helicopters following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra, announcing the outcomes of Thursday's Modi-Macron talks in Jaipur, also said a scheme for exchange of professionals in the age bracket of 18 to 35 years and activation of Schengen visas with a five-year validity for Indian post-graduate alumni were among other key decisions.

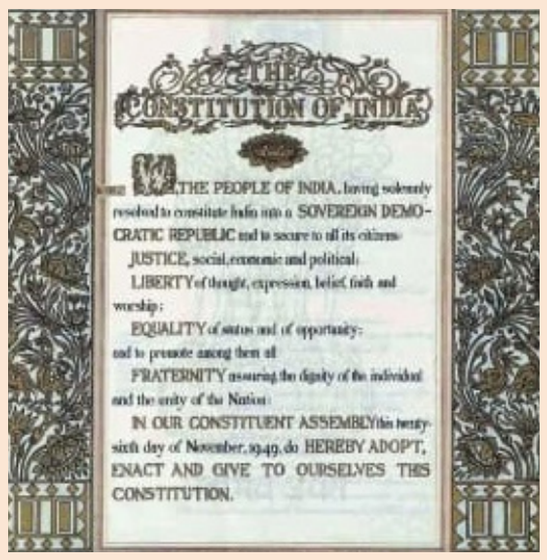
At a media briefing on Friday, Kwatra said both sides deliberated on various aspects to advance civil-nuclear energy cooperation and that there was a "very positive, forward leaning" ongoing conversation on small modular reactors (SMRs).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with chief guest French President Emmanuel Macron during the 75th Republic Day parade, at the Kartavya Path, in New Delhi on Friday; All-women contingent of the Armed Force Medical Services (AFMS) marches past during Republic Day parade. It was the first time an all-women tri-service contingent marched down Kartavya Path PHOTO: PTI

Modi and Macron also delved into the situation in the Red Sea and the "potential disruptions" that it can trigger, besides exchanging views on the conflict in Gaza, he said.

There was no announcement on India's proposed procurement of 26 naval variants of Rafale jets and three Scorpene submarines from France as it is understood that price negotiations for the multi-billion dollar deals are still underway. The two sides also inked a pact on defence space partnership that would facilitate joint work on a space situational awareness program, being considered as significant for developing military satellites and sharing information on space traffic and debris. The foreign secretary said the Tatas and the Airbus Helicopters entered into an industrial partnership for joint production of H125 helicopters in India with a significant "indigenous and localisation component".Under the partnership, Airbus SE is set to put in place an assembly line in India for production of the helicopters. Macron was the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations at the Kartavya Path on Friday. Macron accompanied by Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury, began his two-day visit to India from Jaipur. —*PTI*

SECULAR, SOCIALIST NO MORE


THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA
WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens
JUSTICE, social, economic and political;
LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;
and to promote among them all
FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation;
IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.

Central government on Thursday posted 'original' Preamble of the Constitution on its Instagram handle without the words 'secular' and 'socialist', which sparked a controversy on 75th Republic Day PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/@MYGOVINDIA

PM RSS puppet: Kharge in B'luru

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Mallikarjun Kharge PHOTO: PTI

Charging the Prime Minister Narendra Modi with behaving like a puppet in the hands of RSS, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday accused the organisation and the BJP of conspiring to distort the Constitution.

He also called upon Congressmen and party leaders to face the upcoming Lok Sabha polls with unity and protect the Constitution and democracy.

The Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha was speaking after unfurling the national tricolour at the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee office here on the occasion of Republic Day. "Probably if there was no Constitution for this country, it would not have been possible for us to save democracy. With lots of effort, leaders of our freedom struggle and the Constituent Assembly members gave this country the Constitution," Kharge said. He said the Constitution contains important principles like equality, fraternity, secularism and justice.

eaders were present.

Congress has fought for the freedom of the country, the AICC Chief said, but BJP is claiming to be the "only saviours" of this country. —*PTI*

B'luru man breaches R-Day security

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

- He jumped into the ground from the media box for journalists.

A man was detained after he attempted to illegally enter Field Marshal Manekshaw Parade Ground here to disrupt the motorcycle display during the Republic Day celebrations on Friday.

The security breach occurred when the man, identified as Parashuram, jumped into the ground from the media box designated for journalists, according to a police officer. He threw placards and sheets on the ground and charged towards the gallery where Chief Minister was seated. He was detained by security personnel and whisked away.

According to a video doing rounds on social media, when the intruder was asked if he had a pass, he replied: "I have a pass and the Chief Minister had not given me an appointment to me, that's why I'm here." The motive behind Parashuram's entry into the ground is under investigation. —*Salar News*

Police detain Parashuram PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

HIGH AND ABOVE

Students perform during the 75th Republic Day celebrations at Field Marshal Manekshaw Parade Ground, in Bengaluru on Friday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

ICJ orders Israel to prevent genocide

THE HAGUE, 26 JAN

The top UN court stopped short Friday of ordering a ceasefire in Gaza but demanded that Israel try to contain death and damage in its military offensive in the tiny coastal enclave.

South Africa, which brought the case, had asked for the court to order Israel to halt its operation.

The top UN Court court decided not to throw out genocide charges against Israel for its military offensive in Gaza, as part of a preliminary decision in a case that goes to the core of one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

South Africa, which brought the case, has asked for the court to order Israel to halt its operation in the tiny coastal enclave.

Friday's decision is only an interim one; it could take years for the full case brought by South Africa to be considered. Israel rejects the genocide accusation and had asked the court to throw the charges out.

While the case winds its way through the court, South Africa has asked the judges "as a matter of extreme urgency" to impose so-called provisional measures to protect Palestinians in Gaza and the court could order those on Friday. Top of the South African list is a request for the court to order Israel to "immediately suspend its military operations in and against Gaza." It is also asking for Israel to take "reasonable measures" to prevent genocide and allow access for desperately needed aid.

On Thursday, Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy had said that Israel expected the court to toss out the "spurious and specious charges." —*AP*

PADMA AWARD WINNERS

Olympic gold and Grand Slam-winner honoured

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

A three-time Olympic medallist, two iconic players of the current generation and the flagbearer of Mallakhamb were among those who have been bestowed the Padma Shri awards for their service in sports.

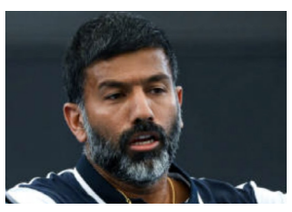
Here's a look at the seven winners who received Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award.

Harbinder Singh (Hockey): An award-winning player, a coach, he was a member of the 1964 Olympic gold-winning Indian hockey team. The centre forward won the gold medal in the 1966 Asian Games and the silver in the 1970 edition where he served as the captain of the team.

Joshna Chinappa (Squash): Joshna is arguably the finest female squash player to have come out of India. Having turned pro back in 2003, her longevity in squash is remarkable and she has no immediate plans to call it a day.

The 37-year-old has won multiple medals at the Commonwealth and Asian Games. Her first singles medal at Asian Games came in 2018 and she also helped India to couple of silver medals in the 2018 and 2014 edition.

Rohan Bopanna (Tennis): Bopanna receives the honour on the back of a terrific season. He is on the cusp of winning his second Grand Slam title after reaching the final of Australian Open.



Uday Vishwanath Deshpande, Joshna Chinappa and Rohan Bopanna PHOTO: X

- The 37-year-old has won multiple medals at the Commonwealth and Asian Games. Her first singles medal at Asian Games came in 2018 and she also helped India to couple of silver medals.

Uday Vishwanath Deshpande (Mallakhamb coach): Deshpande is credited for introducing Mallakhamb, the traditional Indian physical practice, in which a group of gymnasts perform aerial yoga and gymnastic postures using wrestling grips.

Satendra Singh Lohiya (Para-swimmer): Lohiya was born without any disability. But close to a fortnight later both his legs became 70 per cent disabled.

Despite this, Lohiya scripted history as he was part of an Indian relay team that crossed the English Channel in 2018 in record 12 hours and 26 minutes.

Purnima Mahato (Archery coach): Purnima took up archery coaching in 1994. She served as the Indian women's recurve coach in three successive Olympics 2008, 2012 and 2016.

She also coached the Indian women's recurve team that won bronze medals in 2010 and 2023 Asian Games.

Gaurav Khanna (Para-badminton coach): A former national badminton player, Khanna has produced best para shuttlers including Pramod Bhagat, Parul Parmer, Palak Kohli.

A knee injury ended his professional career. Four year's later, he ventured out into coaching. —*PTI*

SUSHIL MODI HINTS AT NITISH KUMAR'S RETURN TO NDA

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi on Friday said doors are never permanently closed to anyone in politics amid indications that Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar may revive ties with his former ally as his equations with INDIA bloc partners turn sour.

Sources in both the BJP and the JD(U) suggested such a possibility but it remained unclear if Kumar, the unquestioned leader of his party, has finalised a deal with the BJP top brass. Speaking to reporters, Modi said, "As far as Kumar or the JD(U) are concerned, doors are never permanently closed in politics. Closed doors open when the time comes but whether they will open or not is for our central leadership to decide." —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

PHOTO: SALAR

KSRTC felicitates 13 drivers on R-Day

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

As many as 13 drivers who completed seven years of accident-free service in Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) were felicitated during Republic Day celebrations at the central office of the corporation here on Friday.KSRTC Managing Director V Anbu Kumar, IAS, awarded the drivers, who are working under the central division, with a silver medal and a cash prize of Rs 2,000. During his address, Kumar highlighted the importance of employees participating in national festivals. He urged them to celebrate meaningfully by remembering and honouring the work, sacrifice and selfless service of the great souls dedicated to nation-building.He hoisted the national flag and paid floral tributes to the portraits of Mahatma Gandhi, BR Ambedkar and Sangolli Rayanna. *—Salar News*

Thief targeting houses mourning deaths held

MANDYA, 26 JAN

A 28-year-old thief who has been targeting houses mourning deaths and those hosting celebrations has been arrested in Mandya. Stolen property, including 521g of gold jewellery, a camera and lens, a bike, and a car, with a total value of Rs 36 lakh were recovered from the thief.Vivek, hailing from Aralakuppe village in Pandavapur taluk, had been targeting houses at Hiremaralli, Chinakurali, Aarti Ukkada, Haravu, Damadahalli and Mahadevpur, among others for over three years, said Mandya District Superintendent of Police N Yatish.Vivek, employed in a mobile shop, exploited moments of vulnerability during funeral ceremonies. He attends the last rites of the deceased and when everyone departs, Vivek strikes at the house making away with gold ornaments and cash. Vivek was caught red-handed while stealing 135 grams of gold jewellery from Shivkumar's house in Mahadevpura village. *—Salar News*

Deve Gowda visits Dharmasthala temple

MANGALURU, 26 JAN

Former prime minister and Janata Dal (S) leader HD Deve Gowda on Friday visited Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala and offered prayers at the Lord Manjunatha temple. Gowda was accompanied by wife Chennamma, sources said. The couple also called on Dharmasthala dharmadhikari (hereditary administrator) and Rajya Sabha member D Veerendra Heggade. *—PTI*

Official suspended after motors fail at project launch by CM

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Karnataka government has suspended a top official of a State-owned electricity supply company after motors failed to function at the launch of a lift irrigation project by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, causing a major embarrassment. The project is to replenish 150 lakes across 79 villages in Periyapatna taluk in Chief Minister's home district of Mysuru.When Siddaramaiah pressed the button to launch the project, the motors did not work, at the event attended by a large gathering, including Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. *—PTI*

BJP trying to lure our leaders and legislators, says DKS

His comments came a day after Jagadish Shettar rejoined the BJP

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Accusing BJP of trying to lure his party's leaders and legislators, State Congress President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday indicated that he too was not silent and that many leaders from the saffron party are in touch with him.

His comments came a day after former chief minister Jagadish Shettar rejoined the BJP quitting Congress. He had joined Congress, ahead of Assembly polls last year, after being denied a ticket by BJP to contest the elections. "I'm in talks with several (BJP) leaders, many are looking at us, I don't want to reveal names," Shivakumar said here as he accused BJP of making all efforts to lure Congress leaders into the party.

"Whom have they left? They are trying everyone, I don't want to take names. But we too know the job, I'm not speaking now that's all, if not (their) houses would have become empty by now, but we are remaining silent that's all," he added.

CM Siddaramaiah, Deputy CM DK Shivakumar, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge at Manekshaw Parade Ground, Bengaluru on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

- Accusing BJP of trying to lure his party's leaders and legislators, State Congress President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday indicated that he too was not silent and that many leaders from the saffron party are in touch with him

Noting that Shettar had joined Congress unconditionally after quitting BJP accusing it of insulting and ill-treating him, Shivakumar said considering his stature being a senior leader, Congress gave him a ticket to contest Assembly polls and despite him losing the polls by a margin of about 35,000 votes, the party made him an MLC. "Denying a loyal party worker the ticket, we gave him a ticket and treated him with respect.....we were aware of BJP leaders contacting him from the last two to three months, and he kept saying he would not go. The day before yesterday (Wednesday) I had spoken to him, but all of a sudden, he announced quitting the party," he said.

Shettar may have quit the party, but Congress is like an ocean, the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee chief said hundreds of people may come to the party, and hundreds may quit, but no one can do anything to Congress. "We have won 136 seats on our strength in Assembly polls. Because of our own mistakes, we might have lost seven to eight seats, or else our calculation was over 141 seats."

Shivakumar also said Congress MLA Laxman Savadi, who too had joined the party quitting BJP ahead of Assembly polls, has assured that he will remain in the Congress and work for the party. "He (Savadi) is a leader of the party and will be an asset to the party," he added.

Shivakumar, hitting out at JD(S) and its leader H D Kumaraswamy for allying with BJP which had brought down the Congress-JD(S) coalition government led by him with the help of "Operation Kamala", said: JD(S) and Kumaraswamy have become spokesperson for BJP. "They (JDS) are hugging and having a relationship with the party that removed them from power," he added. *—PTI*

₹15cr project in Mysuru to tackle construction waste

MYSURU, 26 JAN

Mysore City Corporation (MCC) has come up with a Rs 15-crore scheme to dispose of construction and demolition debris generated in City.

The project will commence once the government gives its approval. A piece of land spread across 7 acres near HanchyaSathagalli was earmarked for setting up a centre to manage construction waste. The debris generated across the city will be first dumped in the said land, which was allotted by Mysuru Urban Development Authority. The waste will be then segregated and materials such as cement, stone and sand will be extracted and reused. The heritage city is grappling with burgeoning construction waste. The debris from constructions and demolitions is dumped haphazardly at vacant government lands along the Ring Road, Vijayanagar 2nd and 4th stages, lakes and canals. Of the 500 tons of garbage generated daily in the city, around 100 tons constitute construction waste, a portion of which finds its way to Jusco Plant Landfill at Sewage Farm.MCC Commissioner Ashad ur Rehman Sharif said the new plan will help tackle the challenges posed by construction waste generated in the city. MCC health officer Harsha said the civic body has initiated talks with tractor operators transporting waste in the city. The tractors will levy a fee from construction waste generators and remit them to the corporation. *—Salar News*

Man shoots son dead

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

PHOTO: X

A 60-year-old man allegedly shot his son to death after the latter refused to give him money to buy alcohol in City. Suresh KG killed his 32-year-old son, Naratan Bopanna, at their residence in Karekalli in the jurisdiction of Kamakshipalya Police Station. The incident happened at 3:40pm on Thursday when Suresh argued with his son to get money to buy alcohol, police officials told **Salar News.** "The disagreement escalated, leading to Suresh trying to open a locked door, Suresh used a licensed Single Barrel Breech Loading shotgun, unintentionally hitting his son Bopanna, who was standing outside," they said. The bullet passed through the door, unlocking the door but hitting Naratan.

Hearing gunshots, residents called police and took Bopanna to hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries at 6.20pm. Suresh attempted to erase evidence by cleaning bloodstains His bedridden wife was present at the house during the shooting. *—Salar News*

Tribals get Padma Shri boost

COOVERCOLLY INDRESH
MYSURU, 26 JAN

The taste of honey and ghee is familiar to him, but the Padma Shri award had remained an unfamiliar terrain for Somanna, an innocent yet resolute figure in the fight for the rights of tribal communities.

Having spent four decades championing the cause of the tribal people in HD Kote taluk in Mysuru district, Somanna was conferred with the Padma Shri award on the eve of Republic Day.

Somanna candidly admitted that he does not comprehend the significance of the Padma Shri award, saying he has to experience it personally. "I have not grown to that level. We are tribals who bring greens from the forest, cook it, and eat it for a living," he said.

For nearly 40 years, Somanna, hailing from Motte Haadi (colony) of HD Kote taluk, has been a staunch advocate for the rights of tribal communities. His efforts have centred around implementing a report containing 35 suggestions to the government, safeguarding the rights of tribal people within forests, preventing their displacement, and securing land for their habitation.

He also highlighted the importance of establishing their rights through tribal songs while addressing issues like poverty and illiteracy among the oppressed.

Despite only having a fourth-grade education, Somanna, aged 66, embarked on his journey to fight for the rights of tribals in 1978. Faced with financial challenges for the fight, his wife supported him by giving her a gold chain.

The burden of responsibility grew on Somanna's shoulders after the untimely demise of his father and mother. With nine children in the family, the struggle for survival led Somanna's father to enlist him as a serf at a young age.

Despite facing adversity, Somanna dedicated himself to fighting for the basic facilities and rights of the tribespeople. *—Salar News*

ISRO posts magnetometer boom on Aditya-L1

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

ISRO has successfully deployed the magnetometer boom on board the Aditya-L1 satellite to measure the low-intensity interplanetary magnetic field in space.

The six metre-long magnetometer boom is deployed in the Halo orbit at the Lagrange point L-1, on 11 January, the space agency said, noting that the boom had been in stowed condition for 132 days since the Aditya-L1 launch. The boom carries two state-of-the-art, high-accuracy fluxgate magnetometer sensors that measure the low-intensity interplanetary magnetic field in space, according to ISRO.

"The sensors are deployed at distances of 3 and 6 metres from the spacecraft body. Mounting them at these distances minimises the impact of the spacecraft-generated magnetic field on measurements, and using two of them assists precise estimation of this influence.

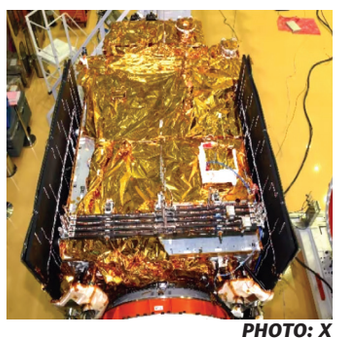


PHOTO: X

The dual sensor system facilitates cancelling out the spacecraft's magnetic influence," it said.

The boom segments are constructed from carbon fibre-reinforced polymer and serve as interfaces for the sensor mounting and mechanism elements, ISRO said. The articulated boom mechanism comprises five segments interconnected through spring-driven hinge mechanisms, allowing for folding and deploying actions, it was noted.

India's maiden solar mission Aditya-L1 reached the L1 point, located roughly 1.5 million km from Earth enabling the spacecraft to view the sun continuously, on January 6, 127 days after it was launched on 2 September, 2023. *—PTI*

R-DAY CELEBRATIONS

Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot takes guard of honour during the R- Day celebrations at Manekshaw Parade Ground in Bengaluru on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Govt working to realise hopes of Constitution: Guv

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on Friday said State government is working hard to realise the aspirations of Constitution, as he highlighted that it has fulfilled the commitment by implementing the five guarantees successfully, and its management of the drought.

The Governor was speaking after unfurling the national tricolour at Field Marshal Manekshaw Parade Ground here on Republic Day. "The Preamble of the Constitution provides to all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The Constitution of India has envisaged all its citizens equal opportunities and equal status to develop themselves with self-dignity and thereby contribute to the development of the nation. My government is working hard to realise these aspirations of the Constitution," Gehlot said.

Further noting that as per norms and procedures delineated in the Drought Manual 2020, Karnataka has declared drought in 223 out of 236 taluks out of which 196 are categorised as severely drought-affected, the Governor said the State government had sought funds from NDRF for undertaking drought relief and mitigation measures in the 195 drought affected taluks. "To alleviate the distress of farmers an interim relief of input subsidy of up to Rs 2,000 per farmer in the drought-declared taluks is being released by the State government directly to the Aadhaar-linked bank account of farmers. The process to transfer about Rs 580 crore to about 30 lakh farmers is underway," he said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, ministers of his cabinet, legislators, and officials were among the dignitaries present at the event, which saw a march past parade by security forces, police, NCC and contingents from schools, followed by cultural programmes.Listing out various programmes being implemented by the government, Gehlot said, "Brand Bengaluru", an ambitious project of the government has been formulated with the idea that the citizen's voice is the government's voice for all-round development of the City of Bengaluru and making it a global hub. Keeping in view the comprehensive development of Bengaluru and realising the need to lay more emphasis on smooth traffic, a Rs 2,000 crore project has been launched and the process of inviting tender for white topping of major roads has been initiated. *—PTI*

INDOMITABLE STRENGTH

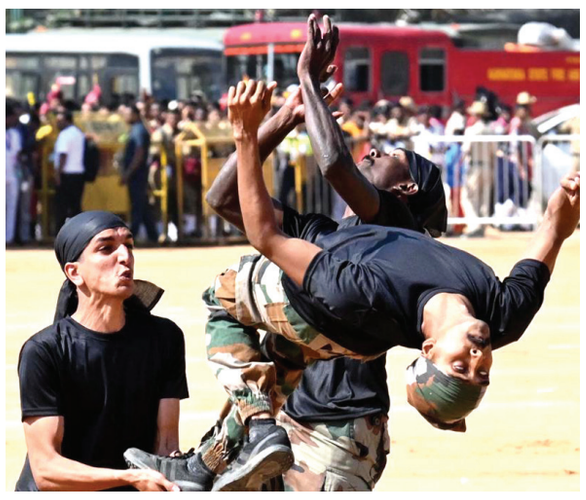
The lives of these Padma Awardees are inspiration to all

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Nine remarkable individuals from Karnataka have been conferred with the prestigious Padma Awards, India's highest civilian honours, this year. Among them are three stories that burn brightly, a testament to the human spirit's indomitable strength and unwavering dedication to service. Dr Chandrashekar Channapatna Rajannachar, a renowned psychiatrist from State, was honoured for making mental health care accessible. Fondly called the "People's Psychiatrist", Chandrashekar has dedicated his life to providing mental healthcare to the underprivileged, particularly in rural areas. "I have adopted several villages around Bengaluru and regularly visit them, treating patients at their doorsteps. This not only makes mental health care more accessible but also helps to break the stigma surrounding mental illness in rural communities," Rajannachar told Salar News.

Tornado team take part during the 75th Republic Day celebrations at Field Marshal Manekshaw Parade Ground in Bengaluru on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Para Military personnel perform during the 75th Republic Day celebrations at Field Marshal Manekshaw Parade Ground in Bengaluru *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*



Madras Engineering Group (MEG) personnels performs during the 75th Republic Day celebrations at Field Marshal Manekshaw *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

The psychiatrist from Arekere in City also works to raise awareness about mental health issues. "I conduct workshops and educational sessions in villages, helping people understand the importance of mental well-being and how to seek help when needed," said Rajannachar, who runs Samadhana Counselling Trust Centre in City.

Chandrashekhar was elated at the honour bestowed on the Republic Day. "I am honoured to receive this high-profile award from Prime Minister himself. Feels like I've achieved something precious in my life."

Prema Dhanraj, a 72-year-old burn surgeon from City, is another individual from State who hogged the limelight on the day. Dhanraj, who works at Christian Medical College Vellore, is a pioneer in the field of reconstructive surgery and operated on 25,000 burn victims. She started Agni Raksha, an NGO which provides rehabilitation for burn survivors from poor families, especially women and children.

Bengaluru native K Rajanna has lost mobility in both his hands and legs to polio, but he dedicated his life to the welfare of people with disabilities. Rajanna was conferred the prestigious award in the field of social work.

Other Padma Shri awardees are 90-year-old industrialist and philanthropist Sitaram Jindal (promotes naturopathy through Jindal Naturecure Institute in Bengaluru); 69-year-old Sridhar Makam Krishnamurthy (literature and education), 43-year-old tennis player Rohan Machanda Bopanna (currently ranked doubles world number 1); 66-year-old Somanna (a tribal welfare worker from Mysuru); 82-year-old Shashi Soni (entrepreneur on hi-tech automotive and defence manufacturing); and 59-year-old Anupama Hoskere (puppetry artist promoting 'Dhaatu Puppetry). *—Salar News*

'Left MLA's anti-Hindu remarks hurt sentiments'

T'PURAM, 26 JAN

The Congress-led opposition UDF has spoken out against a recent Facebook post by a CPI MLA in Kerala, denouncing it for its derogatory remarks against Lord Ram, Sita, and Lakshman, which they say have caused offense to religious sentiments. The opposition also urged the MLA's party and the state's ruling Left to clarify their stand on the matter. The Communist Party of India's (CPI) legislator from the Thrissur Assembly seat, P Balachandran, had withdrawn the post after it became controversial. Leader of Opposition in the Assembly VD Satheesan said that merely by taking down the post the hurt caused to people will not be healed. "It is not acceptable for those who have publicly stated that they do not believe in temple worship, to continuously hurt the sentiments of believers. Bhakti and faith are personal matters," Satheesan said in a statement. He said that Balachandran's Facebook post insults the concept of God and hurts believers and such remarks should have never come from a representative of the people. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

SP MLA Shiv Pratap Yadav dies at 74 in Gurugram

BALRAMPUR/LUCKNOW , 26 JAN

Samajwadi Party leader and sitting MLA from Gainsari assembly constituency in UP's Balrampur district Dr Shiv Pratap Yadav died at Medanta Hospital in Haryana's Gurugram on Friday, family sources said. He was 74.Several state leaders, including Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, paid their tributes to Yadav who had been a minister twice in SP governments.According to family, Yadav, who was undergoing treatment at Medanta, died at around 8.15am Friday morning.Yadav, had started his political career from Lok Dal and was a four-time MLA from Gainsari assembly constituency.His last rites will be performed on Saturday at his ancestral residence in Balrampur. Adityanath in a post on X said, "The demise of MLA Shiv Pratap Yadav is very sad. My condolences are with the bereaved family. May Lord Shri Ram grant peace to the departed soul at His feet and strength to the bereaved family to bear this loss. Om Shanti!" *—PTI*

No going back on quota till demands are met: Jarange

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

Maratha quota leader Manoj Jarange on Friday asserted that he won't abandon his agitation midway till the community is granted reservation in government jobs and education, while Maharashtra minister Deepak Kesarkar said the activist's demands have been accepted.Jarange was addressing protesters at Shivaji Chowk in the Vashi area of neighbouring Navi Mumbai after a meeting with a government delegation.The activist said the delegation has given him some documents which he will discuss with his supporters to announce their future course of action."There is no going back on the agitation till we get reservation," he asserted.The government is trying to persuade Jarange not to proceed to Mumbai. State education minister Deepak Kesarkar told reporters that Jarange's demands have been accepted and they will be fulfilled as per government procedure. So far, 37 lakh Kunbi certificates have been given and the number will go up to 50 lakh, he said. Earlier, the Maratha quota leader reached Navi Mumbai with thousands of supporters to push for reservation for the Maratha community. *—PTI*

Mahagathbandhan on tenterhooks in Bihar

Tejashwi Yadav skipped high tea held at Raj Bhavan

PATNA, 26 JAN

The ruling Mahagathbandhan in Bihar appeared to be on tenterhooks on Friday amid strong indications that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) President, may do yet another volte-face and return to the BJP-led NDA. The trouble was out in the open when Kumar attended the high tea ceremony held at the Raj Bhavan here on the occasion of the Republic Day but his deputy Tejashwi Yadav of the RJD skipped the function. Kumar was seen exchanging pleasantries with other visitors, including BJP's Vijay Kumar Sinha, who is also the leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly.

Emerging from the function, Kumar curtly told reporters that it was for Yadav and other leaders of the RJD, including Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary, to comment on why they skipped the function. The only notable attendee from the party was state Education Minister Alok Mehta.

Nitish Kumar joined hands with RJD in August 2022 after he severed ties with the BJP *PHOTO: PTI*

Neither Mehta nor any other leader of the RJD commented on the absence of Yadav, who is said to have gone into a huddle with close leaders of the party at his residence to chalk out a strategy to thwart the loss of power in the event of Kumar deciding to call off the alliance.

RJD national Spokesman and Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Kumar Jha, who interacted with journalists, said "there is a lot of confusion which is not in the interest of the people of the state. Only the Chief Minister can put an end to the confusion. We hope he will do so by this evening itself".

When asked about Jha's remarks, JD (U) chief spokesperson in the state, Neeraj Kumar shot back "our leader is in the Chief Minister's residence as the leader of the Mahagathbandhan.

There should be no scope for confusion. But if some people still choose to remain in confusion, we cannot help it".

State JD(U) president Umesh Singh Kushwaha also refuted reports.

"All is well in Bihar's ruling Mahagathbandhan and the media speculations are driven by some agenda," Kushwaha told reporters.

Kumar had joined hands with RJD, founded by his former arch-rival Lalu Prasad, in August 2022 after he severed ties with the BJP which he accused of having tried to engineer a split in the JD(U).

The longest-serving CM of Bihar, thereafter, embarked upon a drive to bring together all parties, across the country, to take on the BJP that culminated in the formation of the Opposition bloc INDIA.

Kumar had also virtually declared Tejashwi Yadav as his successor, announcing that the RJD leader would head the Mahagathbandhan in the next Assembly polls, scheduled in 2025. *—PTI*

Dissent must in democracy: Ker Guv

T'PURAM, 26 JAN

Dissent and differences of opinion are essential ingredients of democratic functioning but they should not degenerate into violence, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan said on Friday on the occasion of the 75th Republic Day celebrations here.

Khan also said that institutions of higher education need to be autonomous and free of outside interference that could lead the youth to take part in activities that "pollute the academic environment."

His statements come in the wake of vehement protests against him by the CPI(M)'s student wing SFI, over appointments made by him to senate of some universities, and his displeasure with the ruling Left in the state over alleged political interference in the functioning of varsities by the government.

Khan, leading the Republic Day celebrations at the Central Stadium in the state capital, said that society should not allow group rivalries or internal struggles for power to affect governance as it would set a bad example for the future generations.

Arif Mohammed Khan *PHOTO: PTI*

Governor further said that education was the chief means by which a society is transformed and it is the only effective method to purge the mind of old prejudices.

"The future depends on what we are in our thoughts and actions. For this, we need institutions of higher education which are truly autonomous and free from any outside interference that leads the youth to engage in activities which pollute the academic environment," he said at the event also attended by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

Cooperative federalism requires support from all stakeholders including the states of the union, he added. *—PTI*

Manipur CM silent on imposition of Article 355

IMPHAL, 26 JAN

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Friday maintained silence on reports of imposition of Article 355 in the strife-torn state.

However, a senior official, who refused to be named, said the Article, which grants the Centre the authority to assume control of the state's law and order without dismissing the government, had not been imposed.

Interacting with reporters after the Republic Day function here, the chief minister did not comment on the issue when asked about it.This comes days after Manipur Congress president Keisham Meghachandra claimed that Singh had told him during a meeting that Article 355 had been imposed in the state. *—PTI*

KTR hits back at Governor's remarks on BRS govt

HYDERABAD, 26 JAN

Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan's remarks about the previous BRS Government were truly appalling and is a display of her brazen affection towards the Congress party, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao said on Friday dismissing them as "nonsense." Governor Soundararajan in her Republic Day speech today made caustic remarks against the previous government terming it a "dictatorial government" that was run against the constitutional spirit and that the Telangana society has put an end to the 10-year rule."It (the Governor's comments) is truly appalling, and truly reprehensible, the kind of speech, the kind of words, the kind of nonsense that was coming out through the Raj Bhavan this morning, because for the last 10 years there was a democratically elected government in Telangana. Every single word that the Governor has used today in her speech is truly admonishing and truly insulting and humiliating to the people of Telangana," he said.He further said he was under the impression that the Governor is a "BJP Karyakarta (worker), but unfortunately it seems like she has joined Congress and suggested that she has to enroll in the party and display her "brazen affection" towards party. *—PTI*

7-DAY ULTIMATUM

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee exchanges greetings with people during R-Day function *PHOTO: PTI*

Didi warns of protest if dues are not cleared

KOLKATA, 26 JAN

West Bengal CM and Trinamool Chief Mamata Banerjee on Friday gave the Centre a seven-day ultimatum to clear all dues to the state failing which the party would launch a massive protest.

Banerjee made these remarks during a programme at Raj Bhavan to celebrate the 75th Republic Day.

Banerjee said, "If the central government does not clear the funds, then we (TMC) will initiate a massive protest."

According to West Bengal government's figures, the Centre owes the state Rs 9,330 crore under the PMAY, Rs 6,900 crore under MGNREGA, Rs 830 crore under National Health Mission, Rs 770 crore under PM Gram Sadak Yojna, Rs 350 crore under the Swachh Bharat Mission, Rs 175 crore for mid Day Meals, as well as money under other schemes.

Banerjee had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 20, and discussed the issue of pending central funds.

After the meeting, she said Modi proposed that officials from state and Centre can sit together and clear the issues.

Earlier this week, a team of state government officers visited New Delhi to meet their central counterparts.

According to officials, they submitted a detailed report on alleged irregularities in the 100 days' work scheme and the measures taken to address them. *—PTI*

IN A FIRST

4 French nationals get Padma awards

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Noting that four people from France, the highest for any foreign country, have received the Padma awards this year, official sources said this underscores the strength of India-France relations.

The Padma awards were announced on Thursday, the day French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in India to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade.

Those from France who received the honour include 100-year-old yoga exponent Charlotte Chopin and Kiran Vyas,79, a global yoga and Ayurveda practitioner.

The other two are Pierre Sylvain Filliozat ,87, a Sanskrit scholar dedicated to advancing Indian culture studies and Fred Negrit, an Indologist fostering great awareness and appreciation of Indian culture, according to government citations.

All four of them have been bestowed with the Padma Shri.

Chiranjeevi thanks fans

Veteran actor Chiranjeevi says he is "humbled and grateful" to be honoured to be with Padma Vibushan, an award that he owes to his fans.

The 68-year-old actor's name was announced among the Padma awardees on the eve of the Republic Day. He has been bestowed with the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian honour awarded for exceptional and distinguished service, along with Indian cinema icon Vyjayanthimala.

In a video posted on his official social media pages on Thursday night, Chiranjeevi said he became "speechless" and "overwhelmed" after hearing the news.

"After hearing this news, I became speechless. I am really overwhelmed. I am humbled and grateful for this honour. It's only the unconditional and invaluable love of the people, audiences, my fans, my blood-brothers and blood-sisters that allowed me to reach here. I owe my life and this moment to you," the actor said. *—PTI*

Anant Sutra: Display of 1,900 sarees

New Delhi, 26 Jan

Guests and spectators at the 75th Republic Day parade on Friday were treated to a visual delight with 1,900 sarees and drapes from every corner of the country featured in a unique installation on Kartavya Path called "Anant Sutra".According to Union culture ministry officials, Anant Sutra is a visually stunning tribute to the saree, India's timeless gift to the fashion world. Installation positioned showcased nearly 1,900 sarees and drapes mounted at a height with wooden frames. It also has QR codes to know the details about weaving. *–PTI*

Children during the celebration of the 75th Republic Day, in Mumbai, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Artists from Tamil Nadu perfom during the 75th Republic Day celebration at Kamarajar Salai *PHOTO: PTI*

Students perform during Republic Day parade at Red Road in Kolkata, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Artists from Tamil Nadu perfom during Republic Day celebration at Kamarajar Salai in Chennai *PHOTO: PTI*

BHARAT NYAY YATRA

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with other leaders during the entry of the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in West Bengal from Assam *PHOTO: PTI*

Yatra facing problems for rallies in WB: Cong

SILIGURI, 26 JAN

West Bengal Congress president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Friday said the party encountered difficulties in obtaining permission to organise certain public meetings during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the state, prompting a strong retort from the ruling TMC, which accused him of echoing BJP's rhetoric.

Speaking to reporters in Siliguri, Chowdhury said the schedule of the yatra was submitted to the state administration long ago.

Asserting that the Rahul Gandhi-led yatra was a movement to safeguard the Constitution, Chowdhury claimed that it had nothing to do with the Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking on the issue on Thursday night, Chowdhury had said they thought they would get "relaxations" in some places in West Bengal for public meetings but the administration "is saying that they can't give it".

The yatra, which began in Manipur on 14 January, entered West Bengal from Assam on Thursday, and took a two-day break. It will resume on 28 January.

The ruling Trinamool Congress, however, claimed that the administration in West Bengal is free of political influences. *—PTI*

Adhir apologises to O'Brien for calling him 'foreigner'

New Delhi, 26 Jan

Senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Friday apologised to Trinamool Congress' Derek O'Brien for calling him a "foreigner". The Congress leader called Derek O'Brien to apologise to him and also posted on X that "I conveyed my regrets to MR DEREK O'BRIEN for a word inadvertently uttered by me on him as FOREIGNER". Sources said the TMC leader accepted the apology.While speaking to the reporters on Thursday night in Siliguri, Chowdhury had said, "Derek O'Brien is a foreigner, he knows a lot of things. Ask him."The statement came after Derek O'Brien blamed him for seat-sharing talks between the two parties not going through in West Bengal. "Three reasons for the alliance not working in Bengal Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury," O'Brien told reporters in Delhi on Thursday. *—PTI*

No respite from cold conditions in Punjab, Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 26 JAN

Cold weather conditions continued unabated in Punjab and Haryana on Friday, with temperatures plummeting below normal at several places.According to the Meteorological Department here, Hisar in Haryana reeled under a severe cold, recording a low of 2.7 degrees Celsius.Karnal experienced a cold night at 3.9 degrees while a severe chill swept Rohtak too at 4.6 degrees.Ambala recorded a low of 5.6 degrees, Narnaul 5 degrees, while Fatehabad shivered in 4.1 degrees Celsius.Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, recorded a minimum of 7.1 degrees Celsius.

People across Punjab braved a severe cold with Amritsar at 4.3 degrees, Ludhiana at 4.6 degrees, Patiala and Gurdaspur at 4.8 degrees Celsius, recording below normal minimum temperatures.Bathinda and Faridkot recorded a minimum temperature of 5.2 degrees Celsius. *—PTI*

Blaze at Mumbai timber market, 1 man dead

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

Charred body of a man was found after a major fire broke out at a timber market in south Mumbai early on Friday, a civic official said.The fire was confined to the wood stock in a large area in the Chor Bazaar locality of Grant Road in south Mumbai, the official said.The fire started at around 2 am, and 20 fire engines were deployed to douse the flames, he said.

Authorities vacated a nearby mall and a high-rise since the blaze, described as 'level 4' by the fire brigade, was raging, an official said.

Besides the fire brigade, police, local civic ward officials, BEST staff and ambulances have also mobilised for the firefighting operation.A rescue operation was launched during which firefighters recovered the charred body of a man, he said. *—PTI*

Woman dumps hubby post Ayodhya honeymoon

BHOPAL, 26 JAN

A woman from Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal has filed for divorce after eight months of marriage because her husband took her to Varanasi and Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh along with his parents instead of Goa for honeymoon, an official has said.The application for divorce is pending at the counselling stage and efforts are on for an amicable solution between the woman and her husband, Family Court marriage counsellor Shail Awasthi said on Thursday."They got married on 3 May last year. The woman insisted on going on a honeymoon abroad as they are earning well. The husband is an IT professional, while the woman works in a private company," Awasthi said.The man booked flight tickets to Ayodhya and Varanasi without informing his wife and told her about the trip just a day before departure, Awasthi said.Couple is being counselled but it may take time for the matter to be resolved, he added. *—PTI*

Delhi AQI severe for second time in three days

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

NCR despite the 24-hour average AQI in Delhi breaching the 400-mark for the second time in three days.Delhi's 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 409 at 4 pm, a level requiring authorities to invoke stricter curbs under Stage III of the Centre's Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) to control air pollution.The CAQM sub-committee for operationalisation of GRAP convened an emergency meeting and took stock of the air quality situation, projected AQI and meteorological forecasts, a statement said.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), a dip in temperature and foggy weather allowed accumulation of pollutants in Delhi on Friday. *—PTI*

French aerospace giant to set up unit in Delhi

Defence major Thales will back India's manufacturing

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

India has already procured 36 Rafale jets from France for Indian Air Force *PHOTO: PTI*

As New Delhi and Paris looked to expand strategic partnership, French defence major Thales on Friday said it is bringing its "trusted" high-tech capabilities to India and plans to set up an avionics MRO in Delhi to provide world class services to its airline customers.

Vice President and Country Director of Thales India Ashish Saraf said the company is fully committed and mobilised to support the modernisation and indigenisation efforts that are underway in the Indian aerospace and defence sector.

In their talks in Jaipur on Thursday night, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron resolved to further shore up bilateral strategic cooperation, especially in areas of defence, security, trade and clean energy.

Macron was the Chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations at the Kartavya Path on Friday.

Saraf described the decision to set up the avionics MRO (maintenance, repair, and operations) in Delhi as a "key initiative" and asserted that Thales would fully support India's domestic defence manufacturing.

Asked whether India's planned procurement of 26 Rafale-M fighter jets (marine version) and three Scorpene submarines from France would open new pathways for defence ties, Saraf did not give a direct reply but said Thales is proud to be a member of the Rafale team.

"We are proud to be a member of the Rafale team of which Dassault Aviation is the lead. Thales provides a number of state-of-the-art equipment and systems aboard the Rafale including the radar, the electronic warfare system, optronics, the communication navigation and identification system (CNI), the majority of the cockpit display systems, among others," he said.

- Saraf described the decision to set up the avionics MRO (maintenance, repair, and operations) in Delhi as a "key initiative"

India has already procured 36 Rafale jets from the Indian Air Force (IAF).

"We see huge potential to tap and to further build in-country capabilities across all our key markets including defence, aerospace and digital identity and security in India," Saraf said.

"We have shifted gears and have been taking numerous initiatives to expand our local footprint. One such initiative is our second state-of-the-art facility in Bengaluru that we recently inaugurated," he said.

The French aerospace major has been engaged with the Indian military for over the past seven decades.

—PTI

Ujjain peaceful after clash over Patel statue

UJJAIN, 26 JAN

Two communities pelted stones at each other after Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's statue was destroyed on Thursday *PHOTO: X*

Situation in Makdone tehsil in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain district, which witnessed tension over a statue, remained peaceful on Friday, with markets opening and people unfurling the national flag on the occasion of Republic Day.

Members of two communities had clashed and pelted stones at each other after a statue of former deputy prime minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was pulled down by unidentified people in the area on Thursday morning.

"The situation in Makdone is peaceful with markets remaining open like any other day. The national flag was unfurled at three places in the town," Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP-Rural) Nitesh Bhargava said.

In a video of the incident a group of people was seen pulling down the statue with a tractor. They wanted a statue of social reformer and Constitution's Chief architect Dr BR Ambedkar be installed at the site, instead of Patel's, sources said.

Patel's statue was installed at a site close to the Makdone bus stand late Wednesday night, they said.

However, Bhargava said over the phone that they were still trying to find out when the statue was installed. *—PTI*

GYANVAPI CONTROVERSY

Police intervene as Muslims scuffle with the media over ASI survey report outside the Gyanvapi mosque, in Varanasi, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

6 DEAD IN NAGALAND COAL MINE ACCIDENT

KOHIMA, 26 JAN

At least six workers were charred to death and four critically injured in a fire accident inside an illegal coal mine in Nagaland's Wokha district, an official said.The incident took place at Richanyan village under Bhandari sub-division of Wokha district around 1pm on 25 January, Bhandari MLA Achumbemo Kikon said here on Friday.Kikon, who is in Bhandari to take stock of the situation, said the workers, all from Assam, were engaged in digging inside the illegal rat-hole mine when there was a fire killing six of them and critically injuring four others.The injured were rushed to a hospital in Dimapur, an official said. Expressing concern on such illegal coal mines in Bhandari, the MLA urged the state department to take stringent steps to stop such mines. *—PTI*

BABRI BANNER ROW

According to police, 12 to 15 people allegedly overpowered security personnel and assaulted students *PHOTO: PTI*

200 FTII alumni condemn violence

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Over 200 FTII alumni have written an open letter in solidarity with the students of the premiere institute after an alleged attack on them by right-wing activists over a banner decrying the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid.

The letter has been signed by 207 former students of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), including Oscar winner Resul Pookutty, film editor Anupama Chandra, filmmaker Prateek Vats and actor Shardul Bhardwaj.

"It is painful to see the students of this great film school being assaulted with impunity. We, as a community of film professionals, educators, and artists of both national and international acclaim, extend our support to the FTII student community at this tough and testing moment," the letter said.

The incident at the Pune-based film institute took place on Tuesday, a day after the grand consecration ceremony of the Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

According to police, some 12 to 15 unidentified people allegedly barged into the campus by overpowering security personnel and assaulted students while shouting slogans. They tore up and burnt the banner put up by the FTII Students Association (FSA) and read "Remember Babri, Death of Constitution".FSA has claimed that its president Mankap Nokwoham was among those who were attacked.Alumni group said they "unequivocally condemn" the violence perpetrated on the students of the film institute.

It said the inaction of the police in investigating and taking action against those responsible for the violence was even "more inexcusable". *—PTI*

PUSH FOR NAGA SOLUTION: GUV APPEALS TO ALL

KOHIMA, 26 JAN

Nagaland Governor La Ganesan on Friday expressed concern that the unresolved Naga political issue has posed constraints in the development and growth of the state and appealed to all to push for a solution at the earliest.

Addressing a Republic Day programme at the Secretariat Plaza here, he said the state government is "keen for an early solution" to the problem."Nagaland was formed six decades ago with special Constitutional safeguards that protect the culture, identity and interest of our people.

"The state has been an active partner in contributing to the overall development and growth of our great nation. However, we are all aware of the constraints posed by the Naga political issue, and the solution to which still eludes us, in spite of the best efforts and good wishes of everyone concerned," Ganesan said in his Republic Day speech during the state-level celebration.

However, he thanked all the stakeholders who are working tirelessly to find a peaceful, honourable and acceptable resolution to the issue.While asserting that "the state government is keen and committed to an early solution", he appealed to all the stakeholders to rise above their differences and to "make a united final push to arrive at the eagerly awaited solution". *—PTI*

Father is higher than heaven: HC raps son

RANCHI, 26 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

While delivering judgment in the case of a dispute between a man and his father, the Jharkhand High Court has quoted the Mahabharata and scriptures to highlight the role of a son towards his parents.

Justice Subhash Chand has mentioned the replies of Yudhisthira against the questions of the Yaksha God. The "father is higher than heaven" is one of the statements of the eldest Pandava brother in the Mahabharata.

A 60-year-old man, Deoki Sao, had filed a petition before the Family Court in Koderma seeking maintenance from his younger son Manoj Sao. The court directed him to pay Rs 3,000 per month to his elderly father.

Claiming that his father is money-minded and has several sources of income, Manoj filed a criminal revision in the high court challenging the order of the Family Court.

Deoki Sao, who lives with his elder son, equally divided the agricultural land he owned between his two sons.

It said: "In Mahabharat, the Yaksh asked to Yudhisthira: 'What is weightier than the earth itself? What is higher than the heavens?' Yudhisthira answered: 'The mother is weightier than the earth; the father is higher than heaven."

Even if for the sake of argument, the father earns something; it is pious duty of a son to maintain his old aged father, Justice Chand observed in the order.

He also quoted from a scripture: "Father is your God and Mother is your Nature. They are the seed you are the Sapling."

He used excerpts from the Rigveda, Yajurveda and Manusmriti in the order. *—PTI*

Border fencing needs discussion: CM

KOHIMA, 26 JAN

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio will consult people regarding the matter *PHOTO: PTI*

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Friday said the decision of the Centre to fence the India-Myanmar border needs thorough discussion before being implemented.Asked by reporters about the state's stand on the issue, Rio said the government has to consult the people.

"If the need be then we have to work out a formula on how to solve the issue for the people and prevent infiltration as well, because Nagaland is bordered by Myanmar, and on both sides there are Nagas," he said.

Rio, an ally of the BJP, said that while many people live on the Indian side, their farms are on the other side.

- Rio, an ally of the BJP, said that while many people live on the Indian side, their farms are on the other side

"Therefore there has to be a workable formula," he added.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah last week said the government will end the free movement of people at the India-Myanmar border, and fence it completely so that it can be protected like the country's boundary with Bangladesh.

Deputy CM Y Patton had on Monday said that the Nagaland government will hold meetings with other northeastern states that share a border with Myanmar, and then approach the Centre on the issue.

Various Naga civil society organisations and also the NSCN-IM have opposed the Centre's decision, saying that it would "divide" the Nagas living on two sides of the border. *—PTI*

India logs 187 fresh Covid-19 cases

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

India saw a single-day rise of 187 coronavirus cases, while the number of active infections was recorded at 1,674, the health ministry said on Friday.

One new death from Maharashtra has been reported in a span of 24 hours, according to the ministry's data updated at 8 am.

The number of daily cases had dropped to double digits till 5 December, but cases began to increase after emergence of a new variant and cold weather conditions.

After 5 December, the highest single-day rise of 841 new cases was reported on 31 December, 2023, which is 0.2 per cent of the peak cases reported in May 2021, official sources said.Of the total active cases, a large majority of these (around 92 per cent) are recovering under home isolation.

"The currently available data suggests that the JN.1 variant is neither leading to an exponential rise in the new cases nor a surge in the hospitalisation and mortality," an official source stated. *—PTI*

UP, M'RASHTRA TOP LIST

K'taka has 3rd highest number of colleges

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Karnataka has the third highest number of colleges in the country after Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, according to the government's All India Survey for Higher Education 2021-22.

The AISHE survey was released by the Ministry of Education late night on Thursday.

The top 10 states in terms of number of colleges in India include Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana and West Bengal, each having at least 30 or more colleges per lakh population.

According to the survey, in Uttar Pradesh, there are 8,375 colleges -- up from 8,114 colleges in the previous year -- and there are 30 colleges for every one lakh population.

The states and Union Territories which have a high number of colleges per lakh population are -- Karnataka (66), Telangana (52), Andhra Pradesh (49), Himachal Pradesh (47), Puducherry (53) and Kerala (46).

"Maharashtra comes second with 4,692 colleges. Karnataka comes at the third position with 4,430 colleges whereas Rajasthan is at the fourth position with 3,934 colleges. Tamil Nadu comes at the fifth position with 2,829 colleges followed by Madhya Pradesh with 2,702 colleges," the report said.

Ministry of Education has been conducting AISHE since 2011, covering all higher educational institutions located in India and imparting higher education in the country.

The survey collects detailed information on different parameters such as student enrolment, teachers' data, infrastructural information, financial information, etc.

There are 45,473 colleges registered under AISHE belonging to the 328 universities (affiliating). Of these 42,825 responded in the survey year 2021-22.

"Out of the 42,825 responding colleges, 14,197 colleges are offering PG programmes and 1,063 have PhD enrolments," the report said.

Colleges per district are widely distributed across the country. As much as 10.7 per cent colleges out of total registered in AISHE are in the top 10 districts. The top 50 districts have 31.3 per cent of total colleges. Bengaluru Urban district has maximum colleges (1,106) followed by the Jaipur (703), Hyderabad (491), Pune (475), Prayagraj (398), Rangareddi (349), Bhopal (344), Ghazipur (333), Sikar (330) and Nagpur (326). *—PTI*

SUMMER JOY

A child forms angel wings as other children romp on a court blanketed with foam, during a summer activity in Tongoy, Chile
PHOTO: PTI

Wage theft, debt: Woes of garment workers

Major fashion brands including Barbour and PVH (the owner of Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger) have agreed to pay over £400,000 in compensation to migrant workers in Mauritius. These workers from Bangladesh, India, China and Madagascar had been forced to pay illegal recruitment fees and, alongside other indicators of forced labour, were allegedly subject to deception and intimidation.

These are the findings from an investigation carried out between 2022 and 2023 by Transparentem, a US-based organisation that investigates workers' rights.

Migrant workers across several Mauritian factories reported agreeing to pay fees ranging from a few hundred to several thousand US dollars to secure a good job. But, upon arrival, they discovered the job was poorly paid and expenses were higher than promised.

Exploitative practices like this are actually quite common. The Mauritius case is the latest example of the use of forced labour (the most commonly identified form of modern slavery) within company supply chains. But all garment workers – free and unfree – can experience unacceptable forms of exploitation that can only be countered through sustained labour organisation.

Workers from Bangladesh, India, China and Madagascar had been forced to pay illegal recruitment fees and, alongside other indicators of forced labour
PHOTO: PTI

The coloniality of our wardrobe

In 2013, an eight-storey commercial building called Rana Plaza collapsed in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Over 1,100 people – mostly garment workers – lost their lives, leading to widespread protests and international scrutiny on working conditions in garment factories.

Since then, multiple reports have uncovered labour abuse in the garment sector, including several instances of forced labour.

A New York Times investigation found that Chinese companies were using Uyghurs to make personal protective equipment during the Covid pandemic through a contentious government-sponsored programme. The Uyghurs are a largely Muslim, persecuted ethnic minority primarily from the Xinjiang region of northwest China.

The global emergency that was caused by the pandemic is over – at least for now. But new evidence suggests forced Uyghur labour remains present in 17 industries within China, including the garment industry.

Third-party labour contractors are also prevalent in many global supply chains. Contractors recruit and supply local or international migrant labour, and garment factories rely on them to manage and control their workforce.But contract labourers are vulnerable to abuse. In the lower rungs of the supply chain (in informal workshops and homes), workers often work based on a system of advanced payments. The labour contractor pays the worker an "advance", which locks the worker into their employment. It prevents them from negotiating better salaries or working for others until the debt is repaid.In India, there is evidence that this debt-based system is spreading to garment factories. In Bengaluru, for instance, women in garment factories work under constant debt to their employer. Missed daily targets, lost productivity or time off are turned into debt that workers must compensate through future labour.

Many forced labour practices have a long history, dating back to colonial relations. Both labour contracting and indebtedness characterised the indenture labour system that dominated the production of textiles for centuries. In 19th-century India, for example, indenture workers were managed by labour contractors who paid them advances.

Under this point of view, the contemporary garment supply chain is a modern avatar of the colonial labour plantation.

Illegal terminations and wage theft

Not every worker that stitches our clothing is forced to do so. In fact, the majority are not. But even workers that we would consider to be "free" – those who are not tied to an employer or labour contractor – can experience harsh forms of exploitation.

I recently wrote a report for the International Labour Organization (ILO) with labour activist and colleague Rakhi Sehgal that documents some of the industrial grievances garment workers filed individually or via unions in India. The report is based on a project that contributes to the ILO's Work in Freedom programme. This programme aims to reduce vulnerability to forced labour in south Asia and the Middle East, particularly for women in the garment sector.

We analysed a total of 75 grievances across three of India's export hubs – Gurugram, Bengaluru and Tiruppur – and found shocking patterns of labour abuse.

Our report also highlighted gender differences in labour abuse. Sexual harassment was consistently deployed as a tool to discipline women working on the assembly line. We found widespread evidence of sexual harassment in Bengaluru, but it was also present in garment factories surrounding Delhi.

Social justice on the shop-floor

Cases like the labour abuse in Mauritius are conspicuous and show new connections between modern slavery and migration. But these cases are enabled by centuries of colonial and neo-colonial organisation of production that has involved unacceptable forms of worker exploitation.The analysis of the disputes in our study clearly suggests that social justice is only achievable through collective action.—*Courtesy, The Conversation*

SALAR ساڈا

A Dior bag that shook the South Korean government

The controversy over South Korean First Lady Kim Keon Hee allegedly accepting a luxury bag gift has thrown its ruling People Power Party (PPP) into disarray.

Spy camera footage released late last year appeared to show a pastor presenting a Dior bag to her.

Some analysts say the scandal threatens the prospects of President Yoon Suk Yeol's party in April's elections.

Voters want an explanation from Yoon, polls show, while the opposition has used the issue to attack him.

The video, published by left-wing YouTube channel Voice of Seoul, is reported to have been secretly filmed by the pastor Choi Jae-young using a camera embedded in his watch.

It appeared to show Choi walking to a store to purchase the greyish-blue calfskin bag, with a receipt putting its cost at 3m won ($2,200; £1,800). Choi then visits Covana Contents, a company in Seoul owned by the first lady, where Ms Kim then asks the pastor, "Why do you keep bringing me these things?"

The bag was allegedly given to the first lady in September 2022, according to local media.

While the video does not explicitly show Kim accepting the gift, the Korea Herald reported that the presidential office confirmed receipt of the bag and said that it was "being managed and stored as a property of the government."

Yoon's office is reportedly planning to address the issue "as early as this month", Yonhap news agency reported, citing unnamed sources.

A recent poll showed that 69 per cent of the country's eligible voters want an explanation from the president about his wife's actions. An earlier poll in December showed 53 per cent of respondents believed her behaviour was inappropriate.

> The video, published by left-wing YouTube channel Voice of Seoul, is reported to have been secretly filmed by the pastor Choi Jae-young using a camera embedded in his watch It appeared to show Choi walking to a store to purchase the greyish-blue calfskin bag,with a receipt putting its cost at 3m won ($2,200; £1,800)

The scandal is blowing up just three months before South Korea's legislative elections. It also comes as Mr Yoon's approval ratings have been inching up after dropping steadily over the past year.

Seoul-based political analyst Rhee Jong-hoon has described it as a "political bombshell".

"The Kim Keon Hee risks are only going to get bigger," he told Reuters news agency.

South Korean law makes it illegal for public officials and their spouses to receive gifts worth more than 1m won in one go, or a total of 3m won within a fiscal year.

The opposition Democratic Party has also seized on the issue to attack Yoon and his party.

"It makes no sense for the presidential office and the ruling party to continue to ignore this and talk as if an apology will end the matter," said opposition leader Hong Ik-pyo.

And last week, Kim Kyung-yul, another PPP leader, compared the first lady with Marie Antoinette, the notorious French queen known for her extravagant ways.

It is the latest in a string of controversies surrounding South Korea's 51-year-old first lady.

The opposition has long accused Ms Kim of being involved in stock price manipulation. Earlier this month, Mr Yoon vetoed a bill calling for his wife to be investigated over these allegations.

Last year, Seoul's government scrapped an expressway project amid allegations that its construction would financially benefit Ms Kim's family by raising the prices of land that they own.

The scandal has also caused rifts within Yoon's party.

The president is said to have pushed for his party's leader Han Dong-hoon to resign after Mr Han commented that the controversy "can be a matter of public concern".

"Basically, the matter was a planned set-up using a spy cam. However, there were several misdeeds in handling the issues," the Korea Times quoted Han as saying.

Both men appear to have mended their relationship and Han remains in the party.

Yoon's initial reaction could have been politically costly, Sogang University political science professor Kim Jae-chun told The Straits Times.

"Did he, in a fit of pique, call his chief of staff, and say, 'Just go' to that guy... I mean, you only have 77 days left to the election [as at Jan 24]," he said.

Han is widely considered a protégé and close associate of Yoon and is tipped to be a presidential candidate in 2027. —*BBC News*

Spy camera footage released late last year appeared to show a pastor presenting a Dior bag to First lady of South Korea Kim Keon Hee
PHOTO: YONHAP, PIXABAY

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

How JN.1 is an evolutionary 'step change' in the Covid pandemic

Since it was detected in August 2023, the JN.1 variant of Covid has spread widely. It has become dominant in Australia and around the world, driving the biggest COVID wave seen in many jurisdictions for at least the past year.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) classified JN.1 as a "variant of interest" in December 2023 and in January strongly stated Covid was a continuing global health threat causing "far too much" preventable disease with worrying potential for long-term health consequences.

JN.1 is significant. First as a pathogen – it's a surprisingly new-look version of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes Covid) and is rapidly displacing other circulating strains (omicron XBB).

It's also significant because of what it says about Covid's evolution. Normally, SARS-CoV-2 variants look quite similar to what was there before, accumulating just a few mutations at a time that give the virus a meaningful advantage over its parent.

However, occasionally, as was the case when omicron (B.1.1.529) arose two years ago, variants emerge seemingly out of the blue that have markedly different characteristics to what was there before. This has significant implications for disease and transmission.

Until now, it wasn't clear this "step-change" evolution would happen again, especially given the ongoing success of the steadily evolving omicron variants.

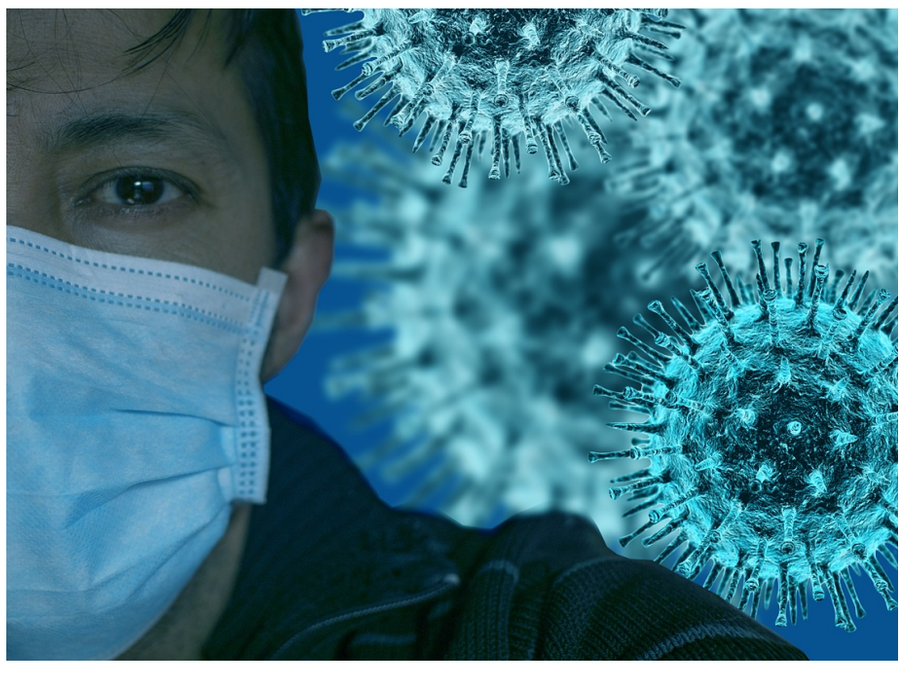
JN.1 is so distinct and causing such a wave of new infections that many are wondering whether the WHO will recognise JN.1 as the next variant of concern with its own Greek letter. In any case, with JN.1 we've entered a new phase of the pandemic.

Where did JN.1 come from?

The JN.1 (or BA.2.86.1.1) story begins with the emergence of its parent lineage BA.2.86 around mid 2023, which originated from a much earlier (2022) omicron sub-variant BA.2.

Chronic infections that may linger unresolved for months (if not years, in some people) likely play a role in the emergence of these step-change variants.

In chronically infected people, the virus silently tests and eventually retains many mutations that help it avoid immunity and survive in that person. For BA.2.86, this resulted in more than 30 mutations of the spike protein (a protein on the surface of SARS-CoV-2 that allows it to attach to our cells).



WHO classified JN.1 as a "variant of interest" in December
PHOTO: PIXABAY

The sheer volume of infections occurring globally sets the scene for major viral evolution.

SARS-CoV-2 continues to have a very high rate of mutation. Accordingly, JN.1 itself is already mutating and evolving quickly.

How is JN.1 different to other variants?

BA.2.86 and now JN.1 are behaving in a manner that looks unique in laboratory studies in two ways.

The first relates to how the virus evades immunity. JN.1 has inherited more than 30 mutations in its spike protein. It also acquired a new mutation, L455S, which further decreases the ability of antibodies (one part of the immune system's protective response) to bind to the virus and prevent infection.The second involves changes to the way JN.1 enters and replicates in our cells. Without delving in to the molecular details, recent high-profile lab-based research from the United States and Europe observed BA.2.86 to enter cells from the lung in a similar way to pre-omicron variants like delta. However, in contrast, preliminary work by Australia's Kirby Institute using different techniques finds replication characteristics that are aligned better with omicron lineages.

> Despite these features, evidence suggests our adaptive immune system could still recognise and respond to BA.286 and JN.1 effectively. Updated monovalent vaccines, tests remain effective against JN.1

Further research to resolve these different cell entry findings is important because it has implications for where the virus may prefer to replicate in the body, which could affect disease severity and transmission.Whatever the case, these findings show JN.1 (and SARS-CoV-2 in general) can not only navigate its way around our immune system, but is finding new ways to infect cells and transmit effectively. We need to further study how this plays out in people and how it affects clinical outcomes.

Is JN.1 more severe?

The step-change evolution of BA.2.86, combined with the immune-evading features in JN.1, has given the virus a global growth advantage well beyond the XBB.1-based lineages we faced in 2023.Despite these features, evidence suggests our adaptive immune system could still recognise and respond to BA.286 and JN.1 effectively. Updated monovalent vaccines, tests and treatments remain effective against JN.1.There are two elements to "severity": first if it is more "intrinsically" severe (worse illness with an infection in the absence of any immunity) and second if the virus has greater transmission, causing greater illness and deaths, simply because it infects more people. The latter is certainly the case with JN.1.

What Next?

We simply don't know if this virus is on an evolutionary track to becoming the "next common cold" or not, nor have any idea of what that timeframe might be. While examining the trajectories of four historic coronaviruses could give us a glimpse of where we may be heading, this should be considered as just one possible path. The emergence of JN.1 underlines that we are experiencing a continuing epidemic with COVID and that looks like the way forward for the foreseeable future.We are now in a new pandemic phase: post-emergency. Yet COVID remains the major infectious disease causing harm globally, from both acute infections and long COVID. At a societal and an individual level we need to re-think the risks of accepting wave after wave of infection. Altogether, this underscores the importance of comprehensive strategies to reduce Covid transmission and impacts, with the least imposition (such as clean indoor air interventions).People are advised to continue to take active steps to protect themselves and those around them.For better pandemic preparedness for emerging threats and an improved response to the current one it is crucial we continue global surveillance. The low representation of low- and middle- income countries is a concerning blind-spot. Intensified research is also crucial. —*Courtesy, The Conversation*

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Mining giants told to pay $9.6 bn over Brazil dam disaster

BRAZIL, 26 JAN

A federal judge in Brazil has ordered mining giants BHP, Vale and their Samarco iron ore joint venture to pay $9.67 billion in damages over a deadly dam burst in 2015. The collapse of the Fundão dam in the south-east of the country caused a giant mudslide that killed 19 people. It also severely polluted the Rio Doce river, compromising the waterway to its outlet in the Atlantic Ocean. It was not immediately clear how much each company is required to pay. Judge Vinicius Cobucci said the companies were liable for "moral damages", or non-material harm, such as emotional distress suffered by those affected by the incident. He added that the money, which will be adjusted for inflation since 2015, will be put into a state fund and used for projects.
—BBC News

Damage puts end to ground-breaking US Mars helicopter

WASHINGTON, 26 JAN

Nasa's Ingenuity Mars helicopter, which made history by achieving the first powered flight on another world, has suffered mission-ending damage. In a statement, NASA said the aircraft was forced to perform an "emergency landing" that damaged its rotors. The space agency's Bill Nelson said the aircraft was "the little helicopter that could" and had racked up far more flights than had been intended. He said Ingenuity had "paved the way for future flight in our Solar System". Ingenuity is said to remain "upright" but images showed that "one or more of its rotor blades" were damaged and it was "no longer capable of flight". Nasa said the circumstances were being investigated.*—BBC News*

King Charles III is hospitalised for prostate operation

LONDON, 26 JAN

King Charles III has arrived at a private London hospital to undergo a "corrective procedure" for an enlarged prostate, Buckingham Place said on Friday. The 75-year old king will be treated at the London Clinic, where the Princess of Wales is recovering after undergoing abdominal surgery. Buckingham Palace has said it will confirm his treatment when it has ended. "The King was this morning admitted to a London hospital for scheduled treatment,' the palace said. "His Majesty would like to thank all those who have sent their good wishes over the past week and is delighted to learn that his diagnosis is having a positive impact on public health awareness.' The publicity around the king's surgery is seen as an opportunity to encourage other men to have their prostates checked. *—AP*

China confirms 2022 conviction of British man for spying

BEIJING, 26 JAN

A British national was sentenced to five years in jail for spying in 2022, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Mofa) has now revealed. The defendant - named as Ian J Stones - committed the "crime of illegally obtaining intelligence for overseas actors". The spokesman added that he had appealed against the sentencing but the case was upheld last September. This was only revealed in a Mofa briefing on Friday. According to an article by the Wall Street Journal (WSJ), Stones worked in China for four decades with big US firms like General Motors and Pfizer and is believed to be aged around 70. He set up a Beijing-based investment management consulting firm some 15 years ago, said the WSJ, citing corporate records, online profiles and people who know him. *—AP*

Laos as new ASEAN chair aims to 'lower tensions in region'

Laos must battle tensions over South China Sea, Myanmar crisis

BANGKOK, 26 JAN

Chinese coast guard ships block Philippine coast guard BRP Cabra as it tried to head towards Second Thomas Shoal, locally known as Ayungin Shoal, at the disputed South China Sea during a rotation and resupply mission *PHOTO: AP*

Simmering tensions in the South China Sea between China and several Southeast Asian nations now regularly spark direct confrontation.

Fighting in Myanmar against the military government that seized power three years ago has grown to the point that most say the country is now in a civil war.

Hopes were high that Indonesia might be able to make significant inroads on both issues during its 2023 chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, using its clout as the bloc's largest country, but little progress was made. Now Laos, the bloc's poorest and one of its smallest countries, has taken over the rotating chair.

As foreign ministers gather in Luang Prabang for this year's first top-level meetings over the weekend, many are pessimistic that ASEAN can keep its biggest challenges from festering and growing.

After the military seized control of Myanmar in February 2021 from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, ASEAN — comprised of Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos — came up with a "Five-Point Consensus" plan for peace.

The military leadership in Myanmar has so far ignored the plan. At the same time, a humanitarian crisis is growing, with more than 2.6 million people forced from their homes due to escalating violence, according to the United Nations.

Indonesia, despite touting more than 180 "engagements" with stakeholders in Myanmar, was unable to achieve a breakthrough.

ASEAN's plan calls for the immediate cessation of violence, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties.

Still, it's likely Laos will approach the situation in Myanmar from its own perspective as the first ASEAN nation since the military takeover to share a border with the country, Faizal said.

At the moment, the Myanmar military is losing ground to a concerted offensive launched in October by three powerful militias that have since been joined by several others around the country.

China is seen to be at least tacitly supporting the initial group, known as the Three Brotherhood Alliance, stemming partially from Beijing's growing irritation at the flourishing drug trade and other criminality across its border with Myanmar. It also has strong influence with the country's military rulers.

Communist Laos is one of the ASEAN countries with the closest ties to Beijing, so it will be interesting to see whether it tries to enlist Chinese support in resolving the Myanmar conflict, Faizal said.

Beijing maintains it will not interfere in the internal affairs of other states, so it's unclear whether it would want to take on a greater role in trying to end the conflict in Myanmar, even if it were acceptable to other ASEAN members.

Many are locked in maritime disputes with China over its claims of sovereignty over virtually the entire South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping.

—PTI

MORE HORROR

50 villagers shot dead in restive Nigerian state

Gunmen stormed villages in Plateau's Mangu district and fired at residents *PHOTO: AP*

ABUJA, 26 JAN

Gunmen killed at least 50 villagers over two days in Nigeria's north-central Plateau state, survivors said Thursday. This prompted a 24-hour curfew and calls for authorities to end violence between nomadic cattle herders and farming communities.

No group took responsibility for the killings that took place in remove villages over a two-day period, the second such attack in less than a month in the state where more than 1 40 people were killed in December.

Gunmen stormed villages in Plateau's Mangu district on Monday and Tuesday firing on residents and setting fire to houses, the Mwaghavul Development Association community association said. Reports of the attacks were delayed because of difficulty in accessing the area.

More bodies were recovered Thursday and many were missing or seriously wounded, according to Mathias Sohotden, a community leader. Amnesty International's Nigeria office said it estimated a death toll much higher than the 30 it has so far confirmed.

The violence angered many in Nigeria and pressure mounted on the country's leader, Bola Tinubu, who is in France on a private visit. Tinubu was elected president last year after promising to tackle Nigeria's deadly security crisis but observers say the situation has not improved under his government.

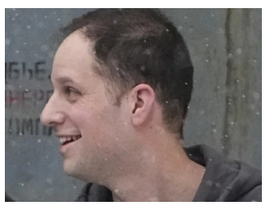
Plateau Gov Caleb Mutfwang imposed a 24-hour curfew Tuesday in Mangu in response to the attacks. However, that did not stop the violence, locals said. Sohotden said the gunmen returned and attacked one of the villages, Kwahaslalek, raising the total casualty figure there to 35. Locals blamed the attacks on herders from the Fulani tribe, who have been accused of carrying out such mass killings across the northwest and central regions. That's where the decades-long conflict over access to land and water has worsened the sectarian division between Christians and Muslims in Africa's most populous nation.

The affected communities in the latest fighting were alerted of the impending attack but did not receive any assistance from security agencies, according to Lawrence Kyarshik, spokesman for the Mwaghavul Development Association community group. Such claims are common in conflict-hit Nigerian communities.

—PTI

Russian court extends detention of US journalist

MOSCOW, 26 JAN



Evan Gershkovich *PHOTO: AP*

A court in Moscow extended the pre-trial detention of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, arrested on espionage charges, until the end of March, Russian news agencies reported on Friday.

United States Consul General Stuart Wilson attended the hearing, which took place behind closed doors because authorities say details of the criminal case against the American journalist are classified.

In video shared by state news agency Ria Novosti, Gershkovich was shown listening to the ruling, standing in a court cage wearing a hooded top and light blue jeans. He was pictured a short time later walking towards a prison van to leave the court.

Gershkovich, 32, was detained in March while on a reporting trip to the Russian city of Yekaterinburg, about 2,000km east of Moscow.

Russia's Federal Security Service alleged that the reporter, "acting on the instructions of the American side, collected information constituting a state secret about the activities of one of the enterprises of the Russian military-industrial complex". Gershkovich and the Journal deny the allegations, and the US government has declared him to be wrongfully detained. Russian authorities haven't detailed any evidence to support the espionage charges.

During his end-of-year news conference in December, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Moscow is in dialogue with the United States on bringing home both Gershkovich and jailed American Paul Whelan, and that the Kremlin hopes to "find a solution" even though "it's not easy". Putin was replying to a question about an offer the Biden administration made to secure the two men's release. Gershkovich is the first American reporter to be charged with espionage in Russia since 1986, when Nicholas Daniloff, a Moscow correspondent for US News and World Report, was arrested by the KGB.

—AP

RED SEA CRISIS

42% drop in Suez Canal trade after Houthi attacks

UNITED NATIONS, 26 JAN

Yemen's Houthi rebels have started attacking ships in Red Sea since November *PHOTO: AP*

Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea have cut Suez Canal trade volume by 42 percent since November, a United Nations (UN) trade official said on Thursday.

The UN trade body sounded an alarm on Thursday that global trade is being disrupted by attacks in the Red Sea, the war in Ukraine, and low water levels in the Panama Canal.

Jan Hoffmann, a trade expert at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development known as UNCTAD, warned that shipping costs have already surged and energy and food costs are being affected, raising inflation risks.

Since attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on ships in the Red Sea began in November, he said, major players in the shipping industry have temporarily halted using Egypt's Suez Canal, a critical waterway connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and a vital route for energy and cargo between Asia and Europe.

The Suez Canal previously handled 12 per cent to 15 per cent of global trade in 2023.

Since November, the Iranian-backed Houthis have launched at least 34 attacks on shipping through the waterways leading to the Suez Canal. The Houthis, a Shiite rebel group that has been at war with a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's exiled government since 2015, support the Palestinians and have vowed to keep attacking until the Israel-Hamas war ends.

The United States and Britain have responded with strikes against Houthi targets, but the rebels have kept up their attacks.

—AP

Russia fires geneticist over remarks

MOSCOW, 26 JAN

Russia's science and higher education ministry has dismissed the head of a prestigious genetics institute. He had sparked controversy by contending that humans once lived for centuries and that the shorter lives of modern humans are due to their ancestors' sins, state news agency RIA-Novosti said on Thursday.

Although the report did not give a reason for the firing of Alexander Kudryavtsev, the influential Russian Orthodox Church called it religious discrimination.

Kudryavtsev, who headed the Russian Academy of Science's Vavilov Institute of General Genetics, made a presentation at a conference in 2023 in which he said people had lived for some 900 years prior to the era of the Biblical Flood and that "original, ancestral and personal sins" caused genetic diseases that shortened lifespans.

He also claimed that children "up to the seventh generation are responsible for the sins of their fathers," according to the Russian news website Meduza.

—AP

Congo rebels kill 19 in attack on eastern town

KINSHASA, 26 JAN

At least 19 people were killed when rebels attacked a town in Congo's North Kivu province, the army said late on Thursday, the latest violence in the country's conflict-battered east.

The rebels shelled the town of Mweso, where they "indiscriminately dropped mortar bombs," which also injured 27 other civilians, army spokesman Lt. Col. Guillaume N'djike Kaïko said in a statement read on state television.

The town's streets were empty Thursday evening, after most of its residents took refuge in the Mweso General Hospital, Kaïko added.

The army blamed the attack on the M23 rebel group, which rose to prominence 10 years ago when its fighters seized Goma, eastern Congo's largest city on the border with Rwanda. Its name refers to a March 23, 2009, peace deal, which it accuses the government of not implementing.

There was no response from the group to the allegation. *—AP*

UN experts warned last year that attacks by M23 fighters have become more frequent *PHOTO: AP*

WWE's Vince McMahon accused of rape

WASHINGTON, 26 JAN

Vince McMahon *PHOTO: X/@VINCEMCMAHON*

A former WWE employee filed a federal lawsuit on Thursday accusing executive Vince McMahon and another former executive of serious sexual misconduct, including offering her to a star wrestler for sex.

The graphic 67-page suit from Janel Grant, who worked in the company's legal and talent departments, also includes allegations that McMahon, now 78, forced her into a sexual relationship in order for her to get and keep a job and passed around pornographic pictures and videos of her to other men, including other WWE employees.

McMahon stepped down as WWE's CEO in 2022 amid an investigation into allegations that match those in the lawsuit, which was filed in US District Court in Connecticut, where WWE is based.

Grant also names as defendants in the lawsuit the WWE and John Laurinaitis, the company's former head of talent relations and general manager.

The AP typically does not name accusers in sexual assault cases, but Grant's representatives said she wished to go public. Email and social media messages seeking comment were also left for McMahon and Laurinaitis.

According to the lawsuit, McMahon lived in the same building as Grant and in 2019 offered to get her a job at WWE after her parents died.

She alleges that he eventually made it clear that one of the requirements of the job was a physical relationship with him and later with Laurinaitis and others.

Over the next few years, McMahon lavished her with gifts including a luxury car, the suit says.

—AP

DEATH PENALTY DEBATE

US carries out 1st execution using nitrogen gas

ATMORE, 26 JAN

The state had previously attempted to execute Smith in 2022, but the lethal injection was called off at the last minute *PHOTO: AP*

A man who was paid USD 1,000 to kill an Alabama woman more than 30 years ago was put to death with pure nitrogen gas, a first-of-its-kind execution that again placed the US at the forefront of the debate over capital punishment.

Kenneth Eugene Smith, 58, appeared to shake and convulse at the start before being pronounced dead at 8:25 p.m. Thursday at an Alabama prison after breathing the gas through a face mask to cause oxygen deprivation.

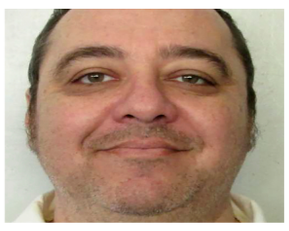
It marked the first time a new execution method was used in the United States since 1982, when lethal injection was introduced and later became the most common method.

Smith appeared conscious for several minutes into the procedure. For at least two minutes, Smith made seizure-like movements on the gurney that sometimes had him pulling against the restraints. That was followed by several minutes of labored breathing. He was pronounced dead after 22 minutes.

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey said the execution was justice for the murder-for-hire killing of 45-year-old Elizabeth Sennett in 1988.

The state had previously attempted to execute Smith in 2022, but the lethal injection was called off at the last minute because authorities couldn't connect an IV line.

The state had maintained the new execution method would be humane, but critics called it cruel and experimental. Those disagreements continued after Smith was put to death.



Kenneth Smith *PHOTO: AP*

Mike Sennett, the victim's son, noted Thursday night that Smith "had been incarcerated almost twice as long as I knew my mom."

"Nothing happened here today is going to bring Mom back. It's kind of a bittersweet day. We are not going to be jumping around, whooping and holler Hooray' and all that. ... I'll end by saying Elizabeth Dorlene Sennett got her justice tonight," he said.

However, Smith's spiritual adviser, the Rev. Jeff Hood, said the execution did not match the state attorney general's prediction in court filings that Smith would lose consciousness in seconds followed by death within minutes.

The execution came after a last-minute legal battle in which Smith's attorneys contended the state was making him the test subject for an experimental execution method that could violate the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

Federal courts rejected Smith's bid to block it, with the latest ruling coming Thursday night from the US Supreme Court.

Sennett was found dead in her home March 18, 1988, with eight stab wounds in the chest and one on each side of her neck.

Smith was one of two men convicted in the killing. The other, John Forrest Parker, was executed in 2010. *—AP*

FM to equal record of former PM Desai by presenting 6 budgets in a row

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Finance Minister NirmalaSitharaman will equal the record of former Prime Minister Morarji Desai when she presents her sixth straight budget on February 1.

Sitharaman, the first full-time woman finance minister of the country, has presented five full budgets since July 2019 and will present an interim or vote-on-account budget next week.

With the presentation of interim budget on February 1, Sitharaman will surpass the records of her predecessors like Manmohan Singh, ArunJaitley, P Chidambaram, and Yashwant Sinha, who had presented five budgets in a row.

Desai, as finance minister, had presented five annual budgets and one interim budget between 1959-1964.

The interim budget 2024-25 to be presented by Sitharaman on February 1, will be a vote-on-account that will give the government authority to spend certain sums of money till a new government comes to office after the April-May general elections.

As the Parliamentary elections are due, Sitharaman's interim budget may not contain any major policy changes. Speaking at an industry event last month, Sitharaman had ruled out any "spectacular announcement" in the interim budget, saying it would just be a vote-on-account before the general elections.

A vote-on-account, once approved by Parliament, will authorise the government to withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund of India on pro-rata basis to meet expenditure for the April-July period.

The new government, which is likely to be formed around June, will come up with a final budget for 2024-25 sometime in July. Usually, interim budgets do not contain major policy announcements, but nothing stops the government from taking steps which are necessary to deal with the urgent issues facing the economy.

Sitharaman, the first full-time woman finance minister, has presented five full budgets since July 2019 **PHOTO: PTI**

After the Modi government came to power in 2014, ArunJaitley took charge of the finance ministry and presented five budgets in a row from 2014-15 to 2018-19. It was in 2017, that Jaitley departed from the colonial-era tradition of presenting budget on the last working day of February to 1st of the month.

PiyushGoyal, who was holding the additional charge of the ministry due to ill health of Jaitley, presented the interim budget for 2019-20 on February 1, 2019. Goyal had hiked standard deduction for salaried taxpayers by Rs 10,000 to Rs 50,000.

Also, the tax rebate for taxpayers whose annual taxable income did not exceed Rs 5 lakh was increased from Rs 2,500 to Rs 12,500.

After the 2019 general elections, in the Modi 2.0 Government, Sitharaman was given the charge of the finance portfolio. She became the second woman to have presented budget after Indira Gandhi, who had presented the budget for financial year 1970-71.

That year, Sitharaman did away with the traditional budget briefcase and instead went for a 'bahi-khata' with the National Emblem to carry the speech and other documents.

Under Sitharaman, India has weathered the Covid pandemic with an array of policy measures announced for the poor and continued its tag of the fastest growing major economy and a 'bright spot' in the world economy.

India is racing to become a USD 5 trillion economy by 2027-28 and USD 30 trillion by 2047. Former Prime Minister Morarji Desai who holds the tag of presenting 10 budgets -- the maximum by any finance minister -- had presented six of them, including one interim, in a row.

The first budget of Independent India was presented by the first finance minister R K ShanmukhamChetty. Sitharaman, who will be presenting her sixth budget in a row, is expected to come up with some measures, especially to boost the rural sector as the agriculture sector growth in 2023-24 is estimated to decelerate to 1.8 per cent, from 4 per cent, in the preceding year.

RakeshNangia, Chairman, Nangia Andersen India said given the proximity to the elections, the budget is expected to focus on immediate fiscal needs rather than introducing broad long-term economic reforms.

In the last interim budget for FY 2019-20, while the overall tax structure remained unchanged, there were certain specific tax rebate and standard deduction concessions. "While major announcements may be deferred until after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the budget is expected to address ongoing concerns and lay the foundation for future economic growth.

This strategic approach aims to balance immediate fiscal responsibilities with long-term economic objectives in a pre-election context," Nangia said

—PTI

Swiggy looks to cut 350-400 jobs

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

On-demand convenience platform Swiggy is understood to be preparing to cut around 400 jobs across various verticals as part of preparations for its initial public offering. As the company works to simplify structure and bring operational efficiencies, around 350 to 400 jobs are expected to be pruned, sources said. These will be across teams spanning technology, call centre and corporate roles, and the job cuts are expected to initiate gradually in the coming weeks. When contacted Swiggy declined to comment. The development comes at a time when Swiggy is preparing for its IPO. Swiggy has been working on simplifying work processes and building operational efficiencies,' a person aware of the development said. Swiggy's headcount is estimated to be around 6,000 at present.*—PTI*

SBI Card Q3 profit rises 8 pc to 549 crore

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

SBI Cards and Payment Services Ltd has reported an 8 per cent rise in net profit to Rs 549 crore for the third quarter ended December 2023. The pure-play credit card company, promoted by SBI, had posted a net profit of Rs 509 crore during the corresponding period of the previous financial year.Total income grew to Rs 4,742 crore during the October-December period from Rs 3,656 crore in the year-ago period, SBI Card said in a regulatory filing.Total operating cost increased by 23 per cent at Rs 2,426 crore for the third quarter of FY24 from Rs 1,974 crore in the previous fiscal, it said. Gross non-performing assets (NPA) rose to 2.64 per cent during the quarter under review as against 2.22 per cent a year ago. Net NPA too increased to 0.96 per cent from 0.80 per cent at the end of the December quarter of the previous financial year.As a result, impairment losses and bad debt expenses grew to Rs 883 crore from Rs 533 crore in FY23.As of December 31, 2023, the card company's capital adequacy ratio was 18.4 per cent compared to 23.1 per cent as of March 31, 2023. As per the capital adequacy norms issued by the RBI, the company's capital-to-risk ratio consisting of Tier I and Tier II capital should not be less than 15 per cent of its aggregate risk-weighted assets on the balance sheet and of the risk-adjusted value of off-balance sheet items.
—PTI

75,000 patents granted in last 10 months: Piyush

NEW DELHI,26 JAN

The Indian Patent Office has granted a "record" 75,000 patents in the last 10 months and it reflects India's ability to innovate, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday.Interacting with innovators and entrepreneurs on the eve of the 75th Republic Day here, the minister also said that 40,000 compliances have either been eliminated or simplified to ease the burden on entrepreneurs."The Indian Patent Office has granted a record 75,000 patents in the last 10 months," he said, adding the government is making it easier to do business and make it less burdensome to meet the requirements of the law and comply with rules and procedures.There has been a significant push to reduce the burden of criminalisation of many laws regarding business in India and the Jan Vishwas law was the first step in that direction and gave the comfort to people and businessmen that the government trusts them, he said."If you make a small mistake, you do not have to worry about criminal provisions," Goyal said..
—PTI

Ola's Krutrim becomes India's first AI firm to turn unicorn

The funds raised will be used in accelerating the company's mission

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

Ola group's AI firm Krutrim has raised USD 50 million at a valuation of USD 1 billion in a funding round led by Matrix Partners, the company said on Friday. This makes Krutrim the first artificial intelligence unicorn from India. "Krutrim , India's own AI company focused on building the complete AI computing stack, announced the successful closure of its first round of funding. The funding round, led by prominent investors such as Matrix Partners India and others, garnered an investment of USD 50 million in equity at a valuation of USD 1 billion," the company said.

The funds raised will be instrumental in accelerating the company's mission to revolutionize the AI landscape, drive innovation, and expand its reach globally.

"India has to build its own AI, and at Krutrim, we are fully committed towards building the country's first complete AI computing stack. We are thrilled to announce the successful closure of our first funding round, which not only validates the potential of Krutrim 's innovative AI solutions but also underscores the confidence investors have in our ability to drive meaningful change out of India for the world," Krutrim Founder BhavishAggarwal said.

AI computing stack announced the successful closure of its first round of funding **PHOTO: PTI**

- Ola group's AI firm Krutrim has raised USD 50 million at a valuation of USD 1 billion in a funding round led by Matrix Partners, the company said on Friday.

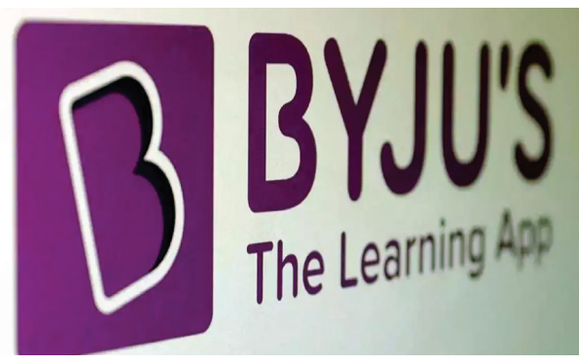
Krutrim unveiled its base Large Language Model (LLM) last month. With the largest representation of Indian data used for its training, Krutrim claims to power generative AI applications for all Indian languages.

Trained by a team of leading computer scientists, based in Bangalore and San Francisco, the model will also power Krutrim's conversational AI assistant that claims to understand and speak multiple Indian languages fluently.Krutrim is a family of Large Language Models, including Krutrim base and Krutrim Pro which will have multimodal, larger knowledge capabilities, and many other technical advancements for inference.

Krutrim last month announced that it will run an early access programme until January 2024 with a simple sign up page on the website.

Additionally, Krutrim's open APIs (tool to embed it with apps) will open to all developers by February 2024.
—PTI

LEARNING APP IN SOUP



The insolvency petition comes as the beleaguered firm is seeking to raise more than $100 mn from existing investors **PHOTO: X**

Byju's lenders file insolvency petition

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

- The move, announced by creditors in an emailed statement on Thursday, is the latest step in the fight-between the startup founded by Byju Raveendran, once valued at $22 billion, and its creditors

Lenders to Byju's Alpha filed an insolvency petition after the Indian education startup missed payment on a $1.2 billion loan. The move, announced by creditors in an emailed statement on Thursday, is the latest step in the fightbetween the startup founded by Byju Raveendran, once valued at $22 billion, and its creditors. Lenders have already taken control of its units in Singapore, while the company is challenging their moves in the US.

The insolvency petition comes as the beleaguered firm is seeking to raise more than $100 million from existing investors through a fresh issuance of shares next month, at a price that values the firm at less than $2 billion, Bloomberg reported earlier this week. The company, which has been battling a cash crunch for several months, will use the proceeds to pay off vendors and stabilize the business. "This is a message to all startups - beware of debt," said SrinathSridharan, a Mumbai-based policy researcher & corporate advisor.

"Equity holders can write off their share value, but debtors have recourse" via the insolvency and bankruptcy code. Raveendran attracted capital from some of the biggest investors in the tech world, including Mark Zuckerberg's Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Silver Lake Management and Naspers Ltd. Mounting Losses But the online tutoring firm lost money after a pandemic-era boom in business dried up. Raveendran pledged his own home, as well as those owned by family members, to raise money to pay employees, Bloomberg reported in December. "The myriad issues facing BYJU's are entirely self-inflicted," the lenders' group said in an email Thursday. "For months, we sought to avoid this exact situation." "It is our belief now that Byju's management has no intention or ability of honoring its obligations under the term loans," the group said. "That said, we are hopeful that India's corporate insolvency resolution process will help stabilise Think & Learn and result in implementing a resolution plan that accounts for the interests of all stakeholders." The filing was made this week to a National Company Law Tribunal in India, people familiar with the matter said, asking not to be identified as the document isn't public yet. Moneycontrol reported the insolvency petition filing earlier. Proceedings 'Baseless' "The validity of lenders' actions, including acceleration of the term loan, is pending and under challenge in several proceedings, including before the New York Supreme Court," Byju's said in an emailed response.

"Hence, any proceedings by lenders before NCLT are premature and baseless."
—Bloomberg

Disney Star mulls legal action against ZEE

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Disney Star is mulling legal actions against Zee Entertainment for backing out from a USD 1.4 billion sub-licensing agreement for TV broadcast of international cricket matches in India, according to industry sources.

This could brew another legal trouble for Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL), which is already facing an arbitration plea by Sony Group at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre, claiming USD 90 million for breach of conditions of their merger agreement.

Disney Star, an Indian subsidiary of media conglomerate The Walt Disney Company, is working on its strategy over the development, said industry sources.

If the rescinded agreement contained an arbitration clause, then Disney Star would have to resort to arbitration proceedings for the resolution of the dispute and if the agreement is short of the arbitration clause, then Disney could initiate legal proceedings to sue Zee for damages.

ZEEL, which has already missed the first instalment of around USD 200 million, has informed Disney Star that it does not intend to move ahead with this.

PHOTO: PTI

According to the sources, this is a fallout of the collapse of its merger deal with Sony.

The installment to be paid to Disney Star was part of the USD 1.5 billion investment committed by Sony Group after its merger with ZEEL, said another industry source while confirming the development.

Sony Corporation had on Monday announced the termination of the USD 10 billion merger agreement with ZEEL, while seeking USD 90 million for breach of conditions besides initiating arbitration.

As per the merger agreement between ZEEL and Sony, the Japanese entity was supposed to invest USD 1.575 billion in the merged entity and have a majority stake.

There were no immediate comments either from ZEEL or Disney Star over the development.

On 30 August, 2022, ZEEL had announced entering a strategic licensing agreement with Disney Star for television broadcasting rights of the ICC Men's and Under-19 global events for a period of four years.

Disney Star will continue to exclusively stream all ICC tournaments through its digital platform Disney+ Hotstar, a joint statement had said.

This was done with the in-principle approval from the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Disney Star bagged the broadcast rights of all ICC events for four years from 2024 to 2027 for the Indian market from the sport's global governing body.

As per the agreement, ZEEL was supposed to have exclusive television rights for ICC men's events, including the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, which will be played in 2024 and 2026, ICC Men's Champions Trophy (2025), and the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup (2027), along with key ICC U-19 events, it said.
—PTI

Thousands of students from across the world appear for test to get admitted to Oxford every year **PHOTO: PTI**

Oxford terminates deal with TCS after glitch

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

The Oxford University has terminated its deal with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) after students experienced technical glitches while taking online admission test for the institution.

"Following the technical problems experienced by some candidates during the delivery of this year's online admissions tests by a new provider, TCS will not be involved in the delivery of Oxford admissions tests going forward," a spokesperson for the university said. Thousands of students from across the world appear for test to get admitted to Oxford every year.
—PTI

Tesla: Electric car makers' shares slide after Musk warns of slowdown

TEXAS, 27 JAN

Shares in Tesla slumped by more than 12 per cent on Thursday after it warned its sales growth would be weaker this year than in 2023.

That wiped around $80bn (£63bn) off the company's stock market value.

The electric carmaker, which is led by multi-billionaire Elon Musk, said its sales growth "may be notably lower" in 2024 despite cutting prices.

Tesla's annual earnings, which were announced on Wednesday, also came in below Wall Street expectations.
—BBC News

ON 75TH REPUBLIC DAY

Foxconn Chairman Young Liu conferred with Padma Bhushan

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Taiwanese electronics manufacturing giant Foxconn Group CEO and Chairman Young Liu was conferred with the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award, on the eve of 75th Republic Day.

As per an official announcement made on Thursday, Liu is the only foreigner among the list of 17 Padma Bhushan recipients.

Under his leadership, Foxconn started making iPhones in India in 2019 after he took over the reins as CEO and chairman from Terry Gou in June 2019.

Apple started making iPhones at the Wistron plant in Bengaluru which has now been acquired by Tata Group.

Foxconn employs over 40,000 people and has plans to double its workforce this year. The group has a turnover of over USD 10 billion in India and it has invested over USD 8 billion in the country till date.

Under Liu's leadership, Foxconn has joined India Semiconductor Mission through which the country is aspiring to set up a semiconductor ecosystem in the country.

Foxconn is in the process of setting up an outsourced semiconductor assembly and test joint venture with HCL Group.

Foxconn will make an initial investment of USD 37.2 million in the JV.

Liu has founded three companies throughout his career which includes a motherboard company, Young Micro Systems in 1988, a northbridge and southbridge semiconductor design company focused on the PC chipset, ITE Tech in 1995 and an ADSL IC design company, ITeX in 1997.

Liu has an MS degree in Computer Engineering from the University of Southern California and a BS degree in Electrophysics from Taiwan's National Chiao Tung University.
—PTI

- Taiwanese electronics manufacturing giant Foxconn Group CEO and Chairman Young Liu was conferred with the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award, on the eve of 75th Republic Day

Liu is the only foreigner among the list of 17 Padma Bhushan recipients **PHOTO: X/PMO**

PHOTO: AP

Klopp to step down as Liverpool manager

LONDON, 26 JAN

Jürgen Klopp has announced his decision to step down as Liverpool manager at the end of the current season, having informed the club's ownership of his wish to leave his position when the 2023-24 campaign comes to a close.After guiding the Reds to another Wembley final on Wednesday night, the 56-year-old will continue to oversee the team's remaining fixtures of 2023-24 before bringing the curtain down on a glorious eight-and-a-half-year managerial reign at Anfield, which has seen the club win six major trophies under his guidance to date. Assistant managers Pepijn Lijnders and Peter Krawietz, as well as elite development coach Vitor Matos, will also vacate their positions at the end of the season, with Lijnders keen to pursue his career in management.—*AP*

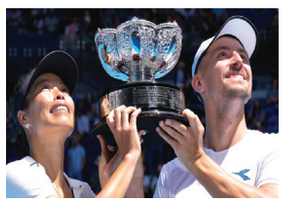


PHOTO: AP

Su-wei and Jan Zielinski win mixed doubles title

MELBOURNE, 26 JAN

Hsieh Su-wei of Taiwan and Poland's Jan Zielinski are the Australian Open mixed doubles champions after beating Desirae Krawczyk of the United States and Neal Skupski of Britain 6-7 (5), 6-4, 11-9 on Friday. It was the first championship final of the 15-day tournament that began 14 Jan. Hsieh and Zielinski led 4-0 in the match tiebreaker before Krawczyk and Skupski fought back. The teams were tied 7-7, 8-8, and 9-9 before the winners pulled away with the final two points.Hsieh has a chance for a second title she will play in the women's doubles final at Melbourne Park with Elise Mertens on Sunday. —*AP*

Indian team frets over visa denial to Prajwal Dev

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

While on-court preparations are in full swing, the denial of a visa to Dev is keeping the team management worried. All the Indian players, except Dev, received their visas on Thursday. "If an injury happens to any player, we will be one-man short. We need Prajwal in the team. Most likely it will be Balaji who will do the singles duty along with Ramkumar and the team is working hard to prepare him for the challenge.Balaji is being forced to play singles since the country's top two singles players.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Hafeez unlikely to get long-term contract from PCB

LAHORE, 26 JAN

Pakistan team director Muhammad Hafeez is unlikely to get a long-term contract from the PCB which is presently being run by the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (Sports) through its nominees. The former Test captain met with the acting Chairman of the board election commissioner Shah Khawar and the chief operating officer Salman Naseer in Lahore to discuss the recent tours to Australia and New Zealand and about his contract. The former Chairman of the interim committee running the PCB affairs Zaka Ashraf had given Hafeez a one-month contract as Director of the Pakistan team.—*AP*

Djokovic stunned by Sinner in huge semi-final upset

Medvedev beats Zverev, sets up final with Sinner

MELBOURNE, 26 JAN

Novak Djokovic's Australian Open title defense is over after a stunning four-sets defeat to Jannik Sinner in the semi-finals. Djokovic had been unbeaten at the Australian Open since 2018 and was on a 33-match winning run in Melbourne but Sinner advanced to his first grand slam final with a remarkable 6-1 6-2 6-7 6-3 victory against the 10-time champion.

Djokovic was bidding for a 25th grand slam title this week but in Sinner, the 36-year-old faced a player who had beaten him in two of their previous three meetings at the end of last season.

The 22-year-old Italian dominated the opening exchanges to blitz an out-of-sorts Djokovic in two one-sided sets.

The third set was closer and Djokovic threatened a comeback after saving a match point to clinch the tiebreak.

But Sinner responded to force the most uncharacteristic of games from Djokovic, with the Serbian being broken from 40-0 up midway through the fourth set.

Sinner's excellent serve stayed strong down the stretch to close out a historic victory.

There's a warm exchange between Sinner and Djokovic at the net! Plenty of respect between the players. On match point, Sinner raised his arms aloft - but that is a cool celebration for such a historic victory.

Novak Djokovic **PHOTO: AP**

Jannik Sinner **PHOTO: AP**

S/f loss is not the beginning of the end: Djokovic

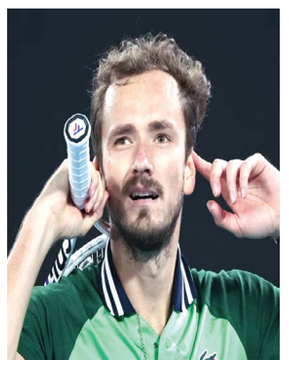
A solitary loss in 11 semifinals at the Australian Open wasnowhere near enough for Novak Djokovic to contemplate a generational change intennis.Djokovic didn'tget a look at a breakpoint during a 6-1, 6-2, 6-7 (6), 6-3 loss to Jannik Sinner onFriday that ended the 10-time Australian Open champion's unbeaten streak aftermaking the final four at Melbourne Park.He commended the 22-year-old Italian for playing "flawless"tennis — it was Sinner's third win over Djokovic in their last four matches —but rated his performance as the worst he could remember at a major."Thistournament hasn't been up to my standard or criteria or the level that I wouldnormally play or expect myself to play," Djokovic said, "but doesn'tnecessarily mean that it's beginning of the end, you know, as some people liketo call it."Let's see whathappens in the rest of the season." . —*AP*

Daniil Medvedev scripts an unreal comeback

Daniil Medvedev scripted an incredible comeback as he rallied back from 2 sets down to beat Germany's Alexander Zverev in the semi-final of the Australian Open 2024.

On Friday, January 26 at the Rod Laver Arena, Medvedev fought hard for 4 hours and 18 minutes to beat his German opponent 5-7, 3-6, 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (7-5), 6-3. It was also the second time that Medvedev bounced back in the ongoing hard-court major after going 2 sets down. In the second round, he beat Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori 3-6, 6-7 (1-7), 6-4, 7-6 (7-1), 6-0.

Medvedev will next be up against Italy's Jannik Sinner, who knocked out 10-time champion Novak Djokovic out of the competition. Medvedev also has his task cut out as Sinner has won 18 out of 19 sets that he has played.



Daniil Medvedev **PHOTO: AP**

Against Medvedev, Zverev started the match with a double break and looked in cruise control, but then Medvedev made a stupendous comeback to make it 5-5. However, instead of getting bogged down, Zverev earned his third break in the set to come up trumps. —*AP*

Indian women's team was dominant in their 11-1 win over New Zealand in the quarterfinals **PHOTO: AP**

India beat New Zealand 11-1 to enter World Cup

MUSCAT, 26 JAN

Rutaja Pisal scored four goals while Deepika Soreng struck thrice as India hammered New Zealand 11-1 to enter the semifinals of the FIH Women's Hockey5s World Cup here.

New Zealand took the lead courtesy of a goal from Oriwa Hepi (2nd minute) but India equalized within fifteen seconds as Deepika Soreng (2nd) found the back of the net with an astonishing finish.

Rutaja (9th) put India in the lead before Mumtaz Khan (10th 11th) quickly fired back-to-back goals. The goalfest continued with India again scoring two more quick goals this time from Mariana Kujur (13th 14th) as the first half ended with India leading 6-1.

India's control of proceedings continued and Rutaja (22nf) scored her second goal of the match. Deepika (25th) also brought up her second goal before Rutaja (26th 28th) added two more goals to her tally.

Deepika (29th) then scored another goal to complete her hat-trick as India won the game 11-1. India faces South Africa in the semifinal. —*PTI*

Bhatia cut Farmers Insurance Open

Sahith Theegala shot consecutive birdies to ease into the safe zone on day two of the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines Golf Course on Thursday along with fellow Indian American Akshay Bhatia, who just made it to the weekend rounds.

Kiran George goes down to Vitidsarn

MYSURU, 26 JAN

Indian qualifier Kiran George's dream run ended in the quarterfinals when he lost to reigning world champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand in the Indonesia Masters here on Friday.

The Indian world number 36 went down 14-21, 6-21 to the world number 9 in a battle lasting 43 minutes.With this, the Indian challenge also ended in the BWF World Tour Super 500 tournament.

World number 19 Lakshya Sen and Priyanshu Rajawat, ranked 30th, had lost their respective pre-quarterfinals on Thursday. World number 7 HS Prannoy, who is the top-ranked Indian, had made an opening round exit going down to Kean Yew Loh of Singapore.India's top men's doubles duo Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty had pulled out of the tournament after reaching back-to-back finals in its last two tournaments.Kiran, who eliminated Chinese Lu Guang Zu from the pre-quarters on Thursday, found himself on the backfoot trailing 0-3 and saw the deficit stretch to 4-8.But he won three points in a row to make it 8-11 at the mid-game break.

The Thai shuttler, however, upped his game to win four successive points en route to take the opening game. Vitidsarn was ruthless in the second game reeling off 11 points in a row on both sides of the the break that gave him a commanding 18-5 lead. —*PTI*

Kiran George **PHOTO: PTI**

Australia back in the contest

BRISBANE, 26 JAN

Kevin Sinclair made a half-century on debut and celebrated his first wicket with a spectacular somersault.

Australia were 24 for 4 with Kemar Roach on a hat-trick. Alzarri Joseph bagged four wickets with hostile pace. Alex Carey made a Gilchrist-esque 38-ball half-century.

Pat Cummins passed 50 for the first time in over five years. Usman Khawaja was Usman Khawaja. West Indies were 64 for 5 and made 311. Australia was 54 for 5 and made 289 for 9 before declaring to bowl with a new pink ball under lights after 9 pm. Australia's two best catchers, Cameron Green and Steven Smith, dropped two sitters at either end of the day.

Tagenarine Chanderpaul fell in the final over of the day via a review.After a truly bonkers day of Test cricket at the Gabba. —*AP*

Jadeja and Rahul make classy fifties as India push England to the corner

HYDERABAD , 25 JAN

Ravindra Jadeja's two-layered fifty and KL Rahul's mastery were at the heart of India's 421 for seven a total which placed them several miles ahead of England after the second day's play of the first Test here on Friday.

Jadeja (81 batting) and Axar Patel (35 batting) who added 63 runs for the unbroken eighth-wicket stand are at the crease at stumps.

India's lead has now swelled to 175 runs and England would find it tough to wipe that out once their turn to bat comes on the third day.

But India's ascendancy to the top on a slightly tacky pitch was more tectonic and Jadeja's risk-managing abilities played a huge role in it. In one sense the situation was ideal for the left-hander who loves a scrap in the middle. When Jadeja came to bat Rahul was in full flight and he joined the party with a few blows of his own.

Jadeja and KL Rahul run between the wickets during the second day of the first test cricket match between India and England at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium **PHOTO: PTI**

The initial 40 balls he faced produced 35 runs as India first closed the gap with England and then swiftly moved into the lead.

But Rahul's dismissal for a 123-ball 86 forced Jadeja to transform his approach. India's lead was still only 42 then and the home side needed him to bat long to construct more floors above that fledgling foundation.

Jadeja did precisely that. He slowed down indeed but not to the extent of confining himself into a shell and opened up whenever England bowlers erred in their lengths.

India 421 for 7 (Rahul 86, Jadeja 81*, Jaiswal 80, Bharat 41, Axar 35*, Root 2-77, Hartley 2-131) lead England 246 by 175 runs. —*PTI*

Debutant Bedare shines as Karnataka recovers from early woes against Tripura

AGARTALA, 26 JAN

Debutant batter Kishan S. Bedare (62, 121b, 9x4), skipper Mayank Agarwal (51, 100b, 10x4) and pacer V. Vyshak (50 batting, 61b, 7x4) saved Karnataka the blushes on day one of its Ranji Trophy Group-C match against Tripura at the Maharaja Bir Bikram College Stadium in Agartala on Friday.

A new-look Karnataka side that had as many as four first-timers — Kishan (25 years), batter K.V. Aneesh (22), all-rounder Hardik Raj (17), and off-spinner K. Shashikumar (21) — found itself at 16 for three after being asked to bat first.

Speedster Rana Datta sent back the seasoned R. Samarth — who returned in place of the injured D. Nischal and K.V. Aneesh, with the former caught behind and the latter bowled. Fellow speed merchant Mura Singh accounted for vice-captain Nikin Jose to leave the visitors reeling.

D Gukesh **PHOTO: PTI**

However, captain Mayank and Kishan dug their heels in and combined for an 87-run partnership for the fourth wicket. Kishan then put together another half-century stand (50) with wicket-keeper Sharath Srinivas (25, 78b, 4x4) for the fifth wicket to get Karnataka back on track.

But from 153 for four, Karnataka slumped to 164 for seven, with Kishan, Sharath, and Hardik back in the hut. Fast bowler Vyshak, however, ensured that the good work done by Mayank, Kishan, and Sharath wouldn't go in vain by scoring his maiden First Class fifty. —*PTI*

Rubiales loses appeal against 3-year FIFA ban

Disgraced Spanish soccer official Luis Rubiales lost his appeal against a three-year ban for misconduct at the Women's World Cup final including forcibly kissing star player Jenni Hermoso on the lips, FIFA said Friday.The FIFA appeals body rarely changes the verdicts of the World Soccer body's disciplinary committee but is a necessary step to pass before taking a case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

COPA DEL RAY

Madrid beat Sevilla to reach semis as Memphis Depay delivers

QATAR, 26 JAN

Atletico Madrid beat Sevilla to reach semis as Memphis Depay delivers-Memphis Depay fired Atletico Madrid into theCopa del Rey semi-finals by earning his team a 1-0 win over Sevilla onThursday.

The Dutch forward, on as a substitute, prodded home in the finalstages to help Atletico join Real Sociedad, Athletic Bilbao, and Real Mallorca inthe final four.

Antoine Griezmann skied a first-half penalty for Diego Simeone'sside who ground out their win against their resilient visitors at theMetropolitano stadium.

Atletico survived a late scare when Pablo Barriosconceded a penalty but the decision was overturned after the referee reviewedthe incident with VAR."Games against Sevilla arealways hard, they were very solid in defense," Simeone told Movistar.

"This (win) gives usexcitement and hope."Players observed a moment ofsilence before the game to pay respect to three Sevilla fans who died in themorning in a traffic accident on the way to Madrid.

Memphis Depay fired Atletico Madrid into theCopa del Rey semi-finals **PHOTO: PTI**

Sevilla coach Quique SanchezFlores said the game should not have taken place as a result.

"I've come to my pressconference to give my condolences to Sevilla fans ... we were playing on a dayon which we should have been holding vigil over people who had been coming tothis game, it's very sad," he said, not taking any questions.

- The Dutch forward, on as a substitute, prodded home in the finalstages to help Atletico join Real Sociedad, Athletic Bilbao, and Real Mallorca inthe final four.

Sevilla defender Sergio Ramos, formerly captain of Atletico's rivals RealMadrid, came in for jeers from the start and almost silenced them as henarrowly failed to reach a free kick.

Sanchez Flores' Sevilla,struggling badly in La Liga, made a strong start but gave away a penalty whenMarcao clumsily fouled Nahuel Molina.

However, Griezmann slipped as heshot, sending the ball wildly looping off target.Sevilla sat deep to defend andfrustrate the hosts, who failed to create any further clear chances until lateon.

Griezmann had a goal ruled outfor offside before Simeone took him and strike partner Alvaro Morata off after66 minutes to shake up his attack, with Depay and Angel Correa coming on.Depay quickly struck and althoughit was chalked off for offside, eventually he did break the deadlock.

Correa cut in well from the rightand slid the ball into the area for Depay to poke home after 79 minutes asSimeone's substitutes teamed up. —*AP*